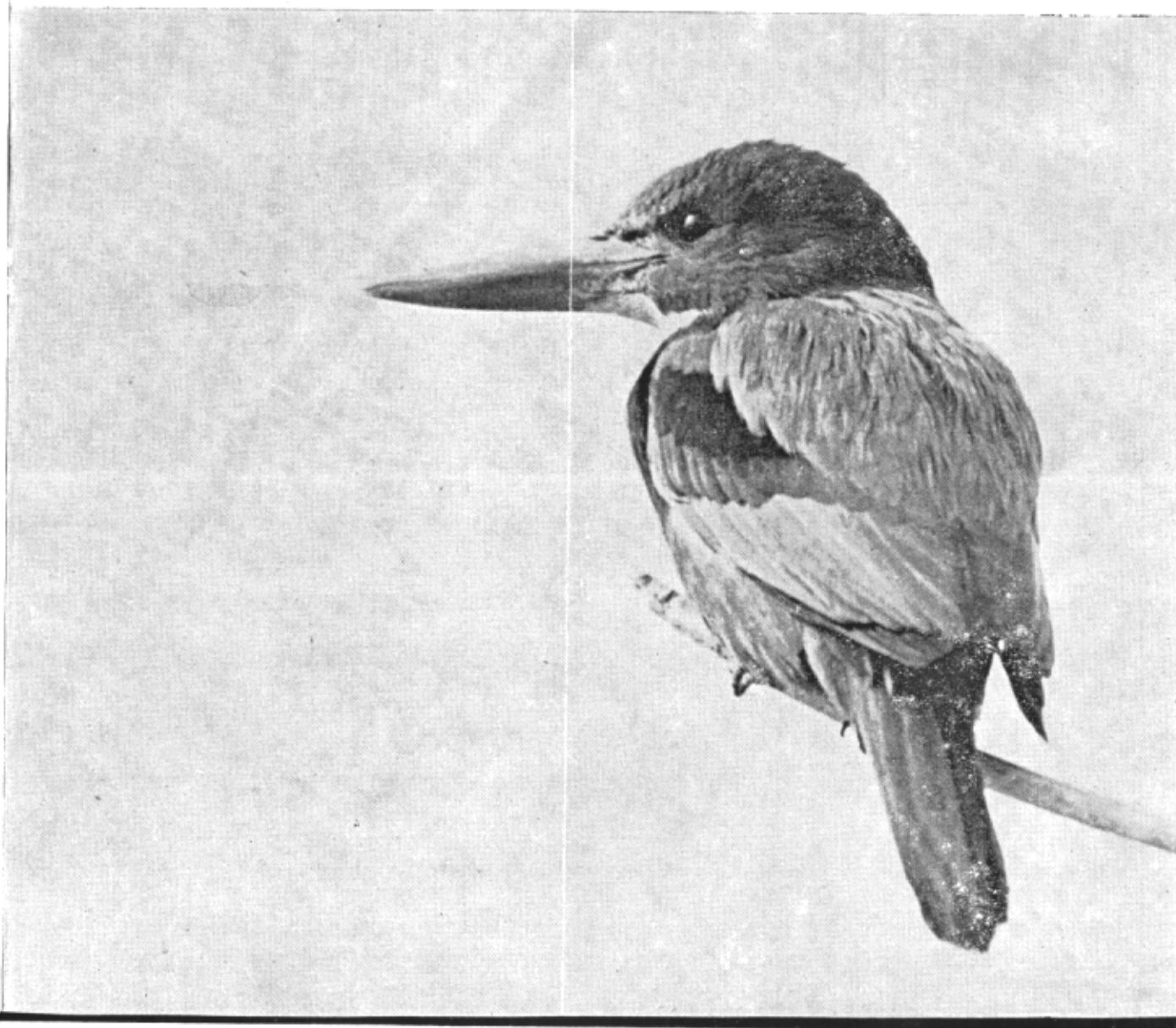


Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPWATCHERS

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BIRDING ON CHRISTMAS DAY

Zafar Futehally

Seldom have I had such enjoyable birdwatching as on Christmas Day. In our garden several resident species which had not been visible for some time came to life, and prominent amongst them were Ashycrowned Finch Larks and Bustard Quails. From time to time these birds either migrate locally or exist so unobtrusively that they are not noticed. The Pied Bush Chats which (in the language of the share market) have been listless and dull for the past many months have become very lively, and are behaving as if the breeding season was on. Actually they are supposed to breed some time between February-May. And our only resident species of Wagtail, the Large Pied (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) whose breeding season varies from place to place gave the impression of being romantically inclined. Hoopoes, Coppermiths, Drongos, Spotted Doves, Spotted Owlets, Common and Jungle Mynas, Common Green Bee-eaters, Whitebreasted Kingfishers, Blue Jays, Wren Warblers and several others all seemed to be competing for attention. In the distance I picked out a Blackwinged Kite and a Shikra with my binoculars, both hunting in characteristic manner. I was delighted at seeing a male Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) a visitor from Europe, back in its wintering grounds.

I was particularly keen to see the water birds on Dodda-Gubbi Lake, a small wetland not far from our home in Bangalore. This aquatic habitat has gone through several vicissitudes in recent years. The tank has been in existence since 1895, and though the water spread area in Government records is 143 acres at full tank level, there has been considerable encroachment by agriculturists to the extent of almost 40 acres. Agricultural operations around such wetlands result in quick siltation and consequently the water holding capacity of these reservoirs is reduced. The periphery of wetlands must be maintained under perennial grass cover, bordered with suitable tree species to prevent erosion and siltation, and to give adequate privacy to the bird species which play such an important role in maintaining a healthy aquatic fauna. Under the aegis of the Karnataka State Council for Science and Technology, this wetland is being studied by a multidisciplinary team who wish to ascertain what steps need to be taken to restore it to its original condition, ecologically speaking. One of the most interesting finds was in May, when the entomologists discovered large numbers of dead mayflies (Ephemeroptera) nymphs lying half buried in the soil. These nymphs form an important link in the food chain of an aquatic ecosystem being the prey of many animals including fish. The cause of their death was the heavy withdrawal of water for irrigation rather suddenly so that the insects did not get a chance to move along with the receding water.

Owing to the very poor rainfall this year in Bangalore - almost the lowest in many years - the Dodda-Gubbi Lake had become an insignificant puddle in October, and no birds were to be seen except Pond Herons and Egrets. A few heavy showers during the Northeast Monsoon in November and December restored the lake somewhat, but I had never imagined that it could harbour such a wealth of bird life until I went there on this Christmas morning. In a few minutes I counted over a hundred Blackwinged Stilts probing into the squelch with their long bills, and obviously, in spite of the death of the mayflies there was no shortage of food. Two Openbilled Storks rosted at the waters edge, while half a dozen others circled overhead and decided to go elsewhere. There was a large number of Brownheaded Gulls, which could be identified by the large white "mirrors" on their black tipped wings. Yellow Wagtails (*Motacilla flava*), the Blueheaded (*Motacilla beema*) and the White Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*) were around. Green Shanks, Sandpipers, Ring Plovers, and many others of the Charadriidae family were eating energetically, reminiscent of humans who attack the refreshments at parties immediately the signal is given. What fascinated me was the large numbers of Ducks and the specialised feeding behaviour of each species. I estimated about 200 Pintails (*Anas acuta*) on the water, and quite often because of their extraordinary "up ending" feeding behaviour only the legs and the tip of the tail was visible, the rest of the bird seeking food below the surface of the water in a perpendicular position. Interspersed with the Pintails were a few Cotton Teals (*Nettapus coromandelianus*) a resident species. Their manner of feeding is quite different. They feed on the surface, sedately, in total contrast with the Pintails. Birds which appear to be unruffled to us humans, reminds me of Sir Peter Scott's remark at the recent WWF Congress at San Francisco. Paying a tribute to the members of the secretariat who work so hard on such occasions, Sir Peter said: "They rather remind one of Swans: all serene on top, but paddling like hell below the surface."

All the other water birds had their own mannerisms and preferences, and this is nature's way of ensuring that the full spectrum of food available is utilised in a habitat. Thus it is possible for large numbers of birds to occupy a comparatively small area. The stability of nature is connected with the diversity of species, and we must remember that variety is not only the spice of life, but in a more significant way, it is the essential principle of our natural world.

FROM SALIM ALI'S NOTE BOOK (V) - Ed.

Trip VIII to Elephanta: 9-10 May 1942

Cacomantis heard

Xanthocheilus haemacephala - A pair feeding young ex nest. Another pr. ditto 2 young. One observed chasing moth along and around branch, flicking wings to stomp it, and then pursuing it in the air.

Corvus splendens - Nest-building generally and several on nest. 2 young in nest high up in Banyan above Cave suptd's bungalow with bright red-pink gapes, probably C. macrorhynchus!

Corvus macrorhynchus - half fledged juv. with wings and tail in quill, lying partly desiccated under the only large Jamun near homestead along shore.

Acridotheres tristis - Several carrying nest material. Breeding apparently general.

Dicrurus macrocerus - Nest under construction in lone Bombax in open country at base of hill. At end of overhanging branch now in fresh leaf. Another nest (No.2) building in Karanj along path to cave.

Turnix s. taijor - First meeting on island. 3!

Halcyon smyrensis - 2 nests in hillside cuttings. 1 ca 20" deep tunnel with 1 egg. Nest No.3 in steep cutting (hillside facing E) c/5. Nest No.4 in steep hillside cutting above main cave. cf. estimated population on Trip VII.

Hirundo daurica - a pair

Oriolus oriolus - solo

Saxicoloides fulicata - Nest with 3 juvs. ca 5 days to week old. Ringed with Nos. 5095, 5115, 5051. Another nest said to have had 3 juvs. yesterday, now empty. A third nest seen by cooly had shell of hatched egg lying nearby.

Merops orientalis - Nest recorded on Trip VII dug up. c/3 Bird caught on nest and ringed No.4686. Tunnel ca 18". A few pairs about, probably all breeding. Local name of Merops: Patur (In Salsette "Pateri")

Otocorps emeria - Nest found by cooly said to contain one partly fledged juv.

Cisticola juncidis - 1 flushed in coarse grass on mudflat (tidal)

Anthus rufulus - 2 pairs

Galerida malabarica - in fallow fields

Gymnorhis xanthocollis - Now common. 1 leading full-fledged chick. Young ex nest generally. Biting into fruit of Odina woder for juice (?) and one actually flying off with berry.

Haliastur indus - adults and brown of year.

Glottis nebularia - solo

Tringa hypoleucos - 2 solos

Numenius arquata - Flock of 7 on rock at shore.

Terekia cinerea - Flock of 6 on mudflat.

Erolia - Several

Lobivanellus indicus - Nest of last week (No.1) c/4 O.K.

No.2 c/4 among stone debris above high water level on shore.

No.3 c/4 in middle of open fallow field.

Butorides striatus - solo on open mudflat at edge of surf.

In flight head and neck not telescoped. Look thick and heavy.

Astur badius - why absent?

No Parakeets!?

Cassia fistula - Now flowering generally - with sparse leaves

Sterculia colorata - A few odd young trees in late flower but mostly with fruit set.

Larus ridibundus (presumably) A few in harbour.

Ringed 40 Roussettus and 35 round eared small bats in caves - total 75.

(Party: McCann, Humayun, Salim, Gabriel)

THREE NESTS OF ASHY WREN WARBLER - DIARY OF ONE SEASON

Arjun Jairemdas

First Nest

19 June, 1976 In a Kachnar bush three nestlings of Ashy Wren Warbler were located.

20-21 June: Both parents feeding the young with flowers of green chillies, lady's-gingers, etc. Occasionally the young were fed with insects.

22 June Young ones left the nest one at a time, apparently without any guidance from the parent birds. Their thick beaks were bright yellow, stomachs whitish, feathers brownish, and tails absent. One of the young had a considerably larger abdomen which was snow white, and appeared to be more inquisitive and less nervous about my presence than the other two.

23 June to 6 July Young ones kept under observation outside the nest while being fed and generally guided by parents. Their tails grew day by day to full size, and the yellow colour of their beaks became lighter. The inquisitive young one referred to above continued to behave differently, and its abdomen did not flatten like that of the other two. Its growth lagged behind, and its stomach remained snow white contrasting with the others.

Second Nest

6 July A second nest of the Ashy Wren Warbler about 30 feet away from the nest was located in a brinjal bush.

10 July One deep wine coloured egg was noticed in the nest. The egg was very shiny, but without any diffusion of the colour at the edges.

11 and 12 One egg each was laid on these two days, making a total of 3.

- 12 July During the days when the female laid the eggs its abdomen appeared to be of deep orange shade, rather than the light soft yellow which is the normal colour.
- 12-15 July The female sometimes sat over the eggs, and sometimes attended to the young of the previous brood. In this she was helped also by the male bird. There seemed to be an attempt by her to direct the young away from the new nest when they came too near it.
- 15 July The colour of the eggs in the second nest appeared somewhat faded in comparison with the first. One of the eggs had a diffused ring at the base. The colour of the ring was originally of dark wine shade. The nest was not too strongly constructed.
- 16 July The nest fell down on the ground, but without any apparent damage to the eggs. On examination it was found that the stem of one of the leaves holding the nest had become porous from inside due to insect attack, and thus it had become weak. I tied the nest back in its original position, and later on found the female incubating the eggs.

Third Nest

- 17 July I found the female sitting in the repaired nest, and flying away from it to a distance of 100 feet. I followed her, and found her working on a third nest, in a gular bush.
- 18 July Both the parent birds were busy building the third nest, each playing its part. The most surprising fact was that only one young, the inquisitive one, sat a few feet away from this nest, and watched the nest building activity for a long time. The parent birds ignored it even though the young one's staring eye followed each parent as it came to the nest with building material, and went on the collecting trip again.
- 19 July At 9.00 a.m. both the parent birds were seen visiting the previous nest (second nest) which contained 3 eggs at that time. At 12-30 p.m. this nest contained only one egg, and as I saw the parents busy at their third nest, I removed the egg with the intention of placing it in the third nest, but abandoned the idea when I found that the shell was pierced and appeared to be empty.
- 21 & 24 The female Warbler's abdomen assumed the orange yellow shade again, and she laid one egg each on these 4 days, and the eggs were of deep wine colour.
- 27 & 28 The colour of the eggs had faded, and were much lighter than when they were laid except at the broad base which gave the impression of a dark ring.

- 3 to 5 During these 3 days all the four young ones emerged from their
August shells.
- 5 to 7 Feeding of the young commenced. Three of the young disappeared,
one on each night. The fourth survived, and the mother sat over
it till its feathers grew.
- 8 to 13 The young one was fed with vegetable flowers as before, but now
"makoi" was added to the diet. The young left the nest on the
13th, and was seen being fed a little away from the nest.

One curious instance was that on the 9th of August when the mother bird after feeding the young left the nest a tailor bird visited the nest and sat just outside it, and for almost 5 minutes peeped inside, constantly extending its neck. It was photographed before it flew away. My strong feeling is that this tailor bird was the inquisitive one to which I had referred earlier. I invite readers' comments on these observations.

THIRTY FOUR YEARS AND NINE MONTHS AFTER SALIM ALI

(Author unknown)

Today (2nd December 1976) morning I visited Elephanta Island and in the evening, having nothing to do, picked up the Newsletter which for some obscure reasons remained unread and found Salim Ali's notes on a visit there on 1st March, 34 years and 9 months ago! Unfortunately, on Elephanta, I had not done any serious birdwatching but being a birdwatcher always makes for the ears and the eyes noticing birds.

First, I was surprised at the time it takes the ferry to get there but then it turned out that the "island" I always had associated with Elephanta was not it. It was, however, a pleasant surprise to see quite a lot of trees on the island. With a little care, how lovely the whole island could become! The photographs of Elephanta just do not convey the atmosphere of the main cave. The forest department as usual and in keeping with their thoroughly pragmatic approach of producing trees for afforestation drives and Five Year Plans have put down plantations of Eucalyptus and Gold Mohurs. How thoroughly unbecoming of a department which should know more about forests and take a greater interest in indigenous forest trees, and that too when jamuns and banyans grow so well here.

Anyway, I was further dismayed to see very few gulls on the way, mostly Blackheaded, a few larger Brownheaded and I suspect a couple of Slender-billed - a suspicion which will compel me to go over again.

It was good to see some really fine specimens of mangrove trees near the landing among which a Whitebreasted Kingfisher and a White Wagtail had their headquarters with a Redshank and several Pond Herons mucking around nearby on the open squelching mud at the edge of the receding tide.

Above the noise of the revellers - a dominant sound near the cave though fortunately not heard on the other half of the island. a Golden Oriole called.

We - S.R. Nayak, who acted as a guide, and his family and self - picnicked under a gracious mango tree on the second hill and here I heard a Magpie . . Robin and a (Green) Willow Warbler. Rather shamelessly I did not investigate a couple of other sounds which I could not quite identify. There were several pairs of Tailorbirds - how these weak-winged mites got here puzzles me - Red Whiskered Bulbuls and Green Bee-eaters. Overhead I saw quite a few Redrumped Swallows, several Palm Swifts and half a dozen Dusky Crag Martins.

A large number of Whitebacked Vultures were circling on thermals on the southern end of the island and they were there holding the uprising air throughout the morning and into the afternoon. A Brahminy Kite flew over, always a beautiful sight.

I was struck by the fantastic potential of this island as a sanctuary for birds. All grazing and fuel collection should, and could easily, be stopped. Trails through the woods for people to amble along, and dense planting of bamboo, jamun, figs of different species and an assortment of flowering bushes and climbers would make this a wonderful sanctuary. Here is an area which conservationists can take on themselves to develop for the choking millions of urban Bombay.

COMMENTS ON BOOK REVIEW

J.S. Serreo

In his review of A Guide to the Birds of the Delhi Area (Newsletter 17, No.1, pp.8-9) Shri Kumar D. Ghorpade points out Podicipitiformes to be an error for Podicipediformes.

Shri Ghorpade has seemingly overlooked the recommendations of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature. Opinion 401 of the Commission validates under Plenary Powers the generic name Podiceps, but by Direction 75 supplementary to Opinion 401 corrects the Family to Podicipitidae from Podicipedidae, and with it the Order.

The generic name Podiceps Latham is a contraction of the original name podicipes, meaning 'vent-footed', derived from the Latin podex (genitive, podicis) meaning vent, and pes, meaning foot. The reference is to what appears to be the awkward position of the bird's legs which are inserted nearer vent, rather than in the middle of the body.

Without the correction in the Family and Order, Podiceps would convey a conflicting meaning.

The remaining errors listed by Shri Ghorpade in four other instances are but a droplet in an ocean of 316 pages of the book.

A BULBUL'S PROTEST

Thomas Gay

The alarm call of a Bulbul is something that every bird-lover will want to investigate; and he will almost always find it to have been provoked by a predator -- feathered, furred or scaled. Of feathered alarm-causers, my experience has hitherto been confined to crows, shikras, owls, keels and other cuckoos.

One day in mid-November, I went out to discover what had alarmed a Red-vented Bulbul who was sitting on top of the lantana hedge just before our door. At first I could make out no possible source of menace; there was no skulking bird, prowling cat or gliding snake to be seen, no statuesque "blood-sucker". When I at last made out the enemy, perched absolutely motionless on a strand of barbed wire in the middle of the hedge, I recognized him as the solitary Rufous-backed Shrike who takes up residence in front of our flat every year towards the end of the Rains. Just beside him, hanging down from the wire, was a small dark object looking for all the world like a Bulbul chick. Reason enough for my small friend to spread the alarm! (And yet -- a bulbul chick in November?)

I stepped forward, putting the shrike to flight, and found that the suspended object was the headless body of a small mouse. So far as my observations have gone, this was the first time any of our Bulbuls has objected to the presence of the Shrike, with whose daily hunting they are all familiar. Can it be that the Bulbul believed, as I had done, that the Shrike was feasting on a Bulbul baby? I can think of no other motive for this particular protest.

Has any other reader recorded any similar observation, either of bulbuls objecting to a shrike, or of their mistaking some other small corpse for that of their own baby?

ON MEETING A NEW BIRD

Thomas Gay

Every birdwatcher knows the thrill of meeting a new bird. How much greater is the joy when the new bird is as lovely as the one I met in mid-September in the splendid sanctuary maintained by the National Defence Academy, Poona! It is a joy which is undiminished even by the sense of "guilt" at not having noticed it earlier during nearly half a century of birdwatching.

My bird, then, was smallish, slender and graceful; mainly black (with some white) above, and almost wholly white below; and with a fantastic rose-pink breast that looked as though the colour had been painted on. After considering such details as size, general shape and sitting posture, and eliminating improbabilities, I tentatively guessed it to be some sort of Minivet, and on returning home I consulted the Oracle. For once, he failed to give the required help (incredibly -- at least in my Eighth edition -- he doesn't

mention the male's pink breast); but fortunately I possess a long-cherished copy of Whistler's "Popular Handbook of Indian Birds", and as soon as I consulted this on Minivets, I found the right answer: White-bellied Minivet (*Pericrocotus erythropygus* -- a good example of a bird named for one of its less distinctive characteristics).

This bird is said to be "found practically throughout India" and to have a "wide distribution ... in the drier parts of the Peninsula." Yet my only sighting of it in all these years was in the by no means dry environs of our Khadakvasla Lake. My friend and fellow citizen Prakash Gale tells me he has observed it twice around Poona. Can it be that the bird's status has not yet been correctly determined? I appeal to those of my fellow watchers who have been privileged to meet this beautiful little bird (once seen, never to be forgotten) to share some details of their observations.

ON THE ONSET OF BRAIN-FEVER

Mosaddique Umar

In the March 1976 issue of our magazine, Mr. T. Gay requested fellow readers to let him know the earliest date in a calendar year on which they had heard the Brain-fever call. I have known the bird rather intimately since my boyhood. During my winter hunting trips to my village, I always was awakened in the early hours by the call of the Hawk-cuckoo. Then a mental struggle -- whether to sacrifice the warmth of the bed or the chance of bagging a red jungle fowl -- develops. I never recorded the date of calling. After reading the letter in question, I asked a village cousin to record the date and time of calling of this bird from 20.12.76 to 4.1.77. When (on January 4) I reached my village and consulted his record, I learnt that the Brain-fever had called every day, including the New Year's Day, during that period and that the call had sporadically begun sometime in November and had become progressively regular thereafter. During my 4-day stay there, I heard the bird at almost all hours of day and night, sometimes 4 or 5 of them from different points.

Although the Sahibs interpret the call as "brain-fever", we in western Assam do it as "bristi hok (let it rain)". Because folklore has it that, when thirsty, this bird cannot drink water like other birds but drinks directly from rain by opening its beaks skyward. How far this is true I have been unable to ascertain because of the bird's extremely shy habits. Although Mr. Kenneth Anderson, the noted hunter-author of Bangalore, has mentioned the Brain-fever as warning the approach of carnivore on many occasions, many of my friends and I never had the same experience while sitting over kills even when the bird was known to be around.

The Bombay Natural History Society and my fellow readers may be interested to know that on 9 December 1976, at a point on the Brahmaputra river, 3 1/2 miles south-east of Dhubri, the Headquarters of Goalpara district of Assam, a fellow shot a Ruddy Sheldrake wearing a ring which reads: MOSKWA C.....; A 121321".

THE KASHMIR ROLLER (*CORACIUS GARRULUS SEMENOWI*) NEAR POONA

L. Khanna

On the morning of 22nd October, 1976, a Kashmir Roller was sighted near Poona on my routine bird watching trip. This Roller, familiar to those who visit the valleys of Kashmir in summer, had perched on a telephone wire by the side of a small river passing through a village, about 35 km. north-east of Poona on the Poona-Ahmednagar road. The time was about 8.10 a.m. and the bird appeared a little sluggish. On closer approach it flew away revealing the characteristic colours of its wings.

On my return trip, I saw the same Roller (or perhaps another bird) again by the side of the road, about 20 km. away from the place where it was first sighted (i.e. about 55 km. north-east of Poona). It had again perched on a telephone wire, and the time was about 11.00 a.m. I am inclined to feel that this was a stray bird - perhaps it was a juvenile - since this was our first sight record of the Kashmir Roller in this area. Furthermore, the "Handbook" states that migration of these birds ceases by early October, and is generally in a south-west direction!

ANNOUNCEMENT

One "Canon" binocular (Japan), coated, 7x50 (376 feet at 1000 yards), 1965 make, almost unused, calf leather case, attachment for glasses, available for immediate purchase; expected price Rs.700/-. Contact Mr. B. Chatterjee, C-17, Panchsheel Enclave, New Delhi 17; Telephone: Residence 651683; Office 634095.

AT HOME

In Rajkot, almost on all Sunday mornings, we go to nearby places for bird-watching. Any visiting birdwatcher is most welcome to join us and share our birding and the titbits we usually take along. Pradeep Pandye of Vidyut Electronics, Near Fire Brigade Station, Sadar, Rajkot (Phone 23708) or Kishor Gehil, 'Viral' 4-Jaganath Plot, Rajkot 360 001 (Phone 26178) may be contacted.

In Jamnagar, Shri Rool, 2/18 Government Quarters, Exhibition Ground, Jamnagar 361001 (Phone 3579) may be contacted. He would be happy to have the company of birdwatchers.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPATCHERS

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INDIAN BIRDS AT THE WORLD OF BIRDS
IN THE NEW YORK ZOOLOGICAL PARK

Donald Bruning

The New York Zoological Society opened its new World of Birds building in June 1972. This building was designed to simulate natural habitats for its avian residents. The breeding success in this new facility has been great. Many species are breeding on a regular basis.

One of the first species to breed in the new building was a pair of Indian Shama Thrushes Copsychus malabaricus malabaricus. Four chicks were reared from the first two clutches of eggs; unfortunately all four turned out to be males. We were unable to locate any female shama thrushes before the breeding adults nested again in 1975. This time they produced three females. As a result of this fortunate turn of events we now have two pairs of young birds in breeding flights at our new propagation area near the World of Birds. The beautiful song of the male shama is certainly one of the highlights of the World of Birds. Directly across from our Asian exhibit we have a small gift shop. The volunteers who operate the gift shop are regularly visited by the male shama thrush who sits on their shelves and sings.

In the same Asian exhibit Indian White-eyes Zosterops palpebrosa palpebrosa, Grey-breasted spider-hunter Arachnothera affinis modesta, Burmese fairy bluebird Irena puella puella, red-billed hill-tit Leiothryx lutea lutea, lesser green broadbill Calypotomena viridis continentis, and a group of Indian pigmy geese Nettapus coromandelianus coromandelianus all make their homes. When our single male pigmy goose died two years ago we started an intensive search for a male as a potential mate for our three females. At last we located a male at the Wildfowl Trust in England and it soon will be introduced to our females.

Fairy bluebirds have nested several times but unfortunately have not been successful rearing their young so far. The most successful breeding pairs in the Asian exhibit have been a pair of Palawan peacock pheasants Polyplectron emphanum which have reared twenty three chicks and a pair of Malayan banded pittas Pitta guaiana irena from which we have hand reared sixteen chicks in one year. If we simply had mates for other species the success would be even more numerous.

On February 20 our female Concave casque hornbill Buceros bicornis bicornis entered her tree hollow nest and has not left it since. The male diligently feeds his mate and helps her attempt to seal the entrance hole. The female seems to be busy incubating an egg, we hope. Last year this pair produced an egg but it proved infertile so we have high hopes for this year.

After two years of searching we have finally located a male Indian pied hornbill Anthracoceros malabaricus malabaricus as a potential mate for our three females. Our three young females were reared by their parents at the Seattle Zoo in Seattle, Washington nearly four years ago.

As the visitor leaves our World of Birds building he has a view of Indian saras cranes Grus antigone antigone feeding in a large exhibit directly adjacent to the building.

We feel very encouraged by the success of our facility so far, but we have even greater hopes for the future. We are concentrating on breeding more and more species here at the zoo. The future of zoos and unfortunately of many animal species depends upon the breeding success of zoos. Buildings such as our World of Birds can then be multifunctional as breeding facilities as well as carefully designed educational displays.

FROM SALIM ALI'S NOTE BOOK (VI) - Ed.

Trip IX 31 May 1942 (Elephanta)

Merops orientalis - Nest of Trip VII empty with one broken egg shell near entrance. Another nest tunnel in bare earthbank - hillside - facing SE. ca 2 1/2 ft. deep. End not touched. Presumably 1 chick only, ca. 12 days old, full fledged, ready to leave nest in about 2 days. Ringed with No 5117. Both parents feeding. Chicks come up to mouth of tunnel to be fed. Adult clings outside hole, shoves food into chick's gape and is off. 1 other ad. feeding juv ex. nest. Altogether about 3 pairs on island.

Halcyon smyrnensis - Nest No 3 (see Trip VIII) now contains 4 naked chicks ca 4/5 days old. Wing quills sprouting; eyes closed. Nest No 2 (1 egg on trip VIII) now cont. 4 hardset.
Demigretta asha - 2 white. Parti-coloured feet
Copsychus saularis - Nest in old horizontal pipe c/5
Glottis nebularia - solo
Lobivanellus indicus - Nest No 1 empty. Nest No 3 empty. Nest No 2 O.K. c/4 Temperature on ground in nest 109 F. Another pair undoubtedly hiding chicks. Very agitated. "Dive-bombing"
Anthus rufulus - solo
Both Dicrurus nests of Trip VIII empty and deserted.
Careya arborea in fresh leaf and fruit. Tamarind in fresh leaf and flower.
(Party: H.A., S.A., Raut, Shamoan, Mukhlis, Shums, Wasim)

Trip X-13/14 June 1942 (Elephanta)

Clamator jacobines - 2
Cacomantis heard
Cuculus micropterus - heard ("x-word puzzle") at 9.30 p.m. (dark, cloudy) 1 or 2 calls only.
Sturnia malabarica - a flock of ca. 10. Some grey-headed but mostly undoubtedly blythii
Riparia concolor - on nest on ceiling of cave verandah at 9.30 p.m.
Dryobates maharattensis - solo
Brachypternus bengalensis - 1 pair, 1 solo. Total population of island ca. 3 pairs
Acridotheres tristis - nesting generally (3!) in old palmyra trunks. Round hole (1) probably woodpecker's.
Merops orientalis - party of 5 (2 ad., 3 flying young) and a pair. Total breeding pop. of island probably ca 3 or 4 pairs.
Halcyon smyrnensis - 2 singing at different places. Total breeding pop. about 5 pairs.
Muscicapula tickelliae - in song. Total population of island (not yet found breeding, but probable) ca. 8 pairs.
Pavo cristatus - "ay-awe" calls heard for first time on island, and 1 cock with long train seen by H.A. Local says breeding in tall grass in monsoon. Steamer agent introduced about 10 birds 10 years ago. At present ca. 15 said to be on isl. Said to fly across to Navha where also introduced. (Strait about 1/2 mile - 3/4 wide)
Aegithina & Otocompsa, commonest birds on isl. Former now very vocal and displaying. Otocompsa fully fledged young ex nest, minus red whiskers!
Cinnyris zeylonia - f.com.
Cinnyris asiatica - only solo. Off plumage with black ventral stripe.
Centropus sinensis - solo (H.A.!)
Lalage sykesii - 1 or 2
Micropus affinis - again (cloudy day)
Corvus splendens - nest on Ber near jetty ca. 10/12 ft. up c/3
Copsychus saularis - 4 chicks in nest in old pipe (see Trip IX) ca. 4 days old. Mouths pale yellow-orange. Not bright. Naked, pinkish-slaty skin. Ringed with Nos 5044, 5070, 5137, 5163.
No Bayas as yet. Gymnorhis apparently all gone.
Dicrurus macrocercus population 3 - 4 pairs.

Monsoon commenced 12 June.

Alangium fruit ripe (pinkish)

Domestic animals on island: Cattle (cows & buffaloes), goats, cats, dogs (scarce - only 2!), fowls.

Crow butterflies coming in from Uran (migration?) flying generally S to N. Raut and self counted 230 from one spot between 10 and 10.10 a.m. Singly or in loose 3's and 4's. Settling on island or passing over. Not molested by any birds. Were observed coming in the same direction yesterday afternoon between 4 & 5 p.m. *

Military building works started ca. April on quarry hill above landing jetty, proceeding apace. Large influx of workmen.

Ringed 50 bats in caves; 30 *Rousettus*, 3 *Taphozous*, 11 pointed eared small, 6 round-eared small.

Bunches of Red cotton bugs of all ages on *Bombax* seeds lying on ground. Some in copula!

* See mig. of Butterflies by EHA (JBNHS XI - 336)

(Party: H.A., McCann, Raut, S.A., Amir)

ABOUT THE WINTER VISITORS TO THE NILGIRIS

Md. Ali Reza Khan

I have some information which may supplement the note on the Winter Visitors to the Nilgiris by Priya Davider in Newsletter 12 of Vol.16, 1976.

I am including a table to indicate possible dates of arrival and departure of some of the regular winter migrants of the upper plateau (1,700 m above mean sea level) of the Nilgiris.

During my two years (1974-76) stay in the Nilgiris I have seen 193 species and subspecies excluding waterfowl. Of these, 26 are winter migrants and 6 (sunbirds, Little Spiderhunter, Lorikeet and Hoopoe) are local migrants.

In the table I have not mentioned Pale Harrier, Short-toed Eagle, European Kestrel, Common Sandpiper, Wood Snipe, Pintail & Fantail Snipes, Wood Cock, Indian Pitta, Indian Grey Drongo, Rosy Pastor, Lesser Whitethroat, White-throated Ground Thrush and Indian White Wagtail, because I was not sure of their dates of arrival and departure, but certainly they do visit the lower and upper plateaux.

The most gregarious of all the migrants (excluding waterfowl) is possibly the Rosy Pastor (*Sturnus roseus*) seen in large flocks in the Nilgiri-Wynad. The Common Indian Rose Finch is possibly next to it. The Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia c. blythi* Ticehurst & Whistler) is another very common migrant. In the lower plateau of the Nilgiris and other southern parts of the Western Ghats (as well as northern India) this is very common. In Masinagudi I have seen them visiting flowers of Flame of the Forest (*Butea frondosa*) and picking up insects.

About the Blue Chat I would like to say that they have very unequal ratio of sexes, which may be 25 males to 1 female. I have seen over a hundred males but only two females in the Nilgiris, and about 70 males in other parts of the Western Ghats against only one female from an unexpected area, near Kottoor, ca. 60 km from Trivandrum. I trapped seven of them in Coonoor and all were male. As the female is absolutely different from the male in its plumage there is no chance of mistaking the sexes. These observations need to be further followed up by the resident birdwatchers who can put more effort into it than a migrant like me. In winter every bit of undergrowth, bush and thicket, be it in a private garden or in natural forest, is occupied by the Blue Chats. They are very territorial and are aggressive towards other birds especially the Black-and-Orange Flycatcher.

The Forest Wagtail is by no means silent as has been emphasized by Miss Davidar. When it walks over the dead leaves of the forest floor it is well camouflaged against the background, but at that time its characteristic single note "Trek" or "Tonk" reveals its whereabouts ("pink" of Salim Ali, Birds of Kerala).

Although the Pied Ground Thrush is generally considered to be a passage migrant to the Nilgiris, I have seen them spending quite a long period here. I used to watch a pair near Hebron School, Coonoor and another at Highfield shola where there were Black-and-Orange Flycatchers too. They always live in pairs and seemed to be territorial.

Table

M I G R A N T S

<u>Name of the bird</u>	<u>Dt. of arrival</u>	<u>Dt. of departure</u>	<u>Status</u>
Eastern Grey Wagtail	Sept 1st week	April end	Very Common
Tickell's Leaf Warbler	" " "	May end	Common
Dull Green Leaf Warbler	" " "	May 1st week	Fairly Common
Blyth's Reed Warbler	Oct. " "	May end	F.C.
Indian Blue Chat	" 3rd "	May 2nd week	V.C.
Blueheaded Rock Thrush	Nov. 1st "	April end	F.C.
Blue Rock Thrush			Few (4)
Brown Flycatcher	Nov. 1st week	April 3rd week	F.C.
Layard's (Brownbreasted) Flycatcher	" 2nd "	" " "	F.
Indian Rose Finch	" " "	" 1st "	V.C.
Redbreasted Flycatcher	" 4th "	April 1st week	F.(2)

LOCAL MIGRANTS

Small Sunbird	Apr (5th 1976)	October-November	V.C.
Hoopoe	Nov 1st week	May-June	C.
Lorikeet	February	June	F.C.

THE SACRED BIRDS OF THIRUKKALUKUNDRAM

KK Neelakantan

No one seems to know when a couple of White Scavenger Vultures (Neophron percnopterus) began to appear every day at noon on a rock near the temple at Thirukkalukundram in Tamil Nadu. However, the name of the place (which means "the hill of the holy vultures") itself suggests that it must have happened long ago.

In the 1940's, when I first heard about it, the daily visit of the vultures was believed to be as certain as sunrise. Although, unfortunately, I never managed to visit the temple and see this miraculous performance of the vultures, it has never ceased to intrigue me. Questions such as - 'Is it the same birds which appear every day? Are the birds which come today the same as those which had originally developed the habit of accepting the sacred offering? Who trained them to do this? Why? When? (A friend of mine suggested rather facetiously that some ancient saint might have tamed a pair of Neophrons and 'conditioned' them to the ritual in order to justify the name of the temple.) Is the habit passed on by one pair to their progeny? If so, why is it that never have more than two birds appeared? How did the offal-feeding Neophron take to sweet pudding and ghee?' - have nagged me whenever I thought about this mystery.

My daughter and her friends visited Thirukkalukundram on 22-xi-1976 in the course of a study tour. On the way they had heard that for 4 days the vultures had not been turning up. They reached the temple at 11 a.m. and saw the priest waiting with a pitcher of water, a dish of pudding and other paraphernalia. The vultures were expected to arrive at 11.30, but though they waited till 1.30 p.m. no vultures were seen even in the sky.

And that raises some more questions. Was it only for a few days in the third week of November 1976 that the birds kept away from the temple? If not, and the vultures have totally given up the habit, what is the reason for it? Are the birds which had kept up the ritual dead? Would they have died simultaneously? Are there any scavenger vultures surviving in the area?

After scribbling this much, it occurred to me that my books might throw some light on the mystery. At least, if Blanford had mentioned the sacred vultures in the "Fauna", it would prove that by 1895 (the year in which Volume III of 'BIRDS' came out) the place had become famous. But, not only Blanford, even Baker and Inglis (1930, Birds of Southern India), Whistler and Kinnear (1935, Vernay Survey Report) and Whistler (1949, The Handbook of Indian Birds) make no mention of Thirukkalukundram. Only in the 1st Volume of the Handbook (1968, Salim Ali and Ripley) does Salim Ali write in his characteristic style about these fascinating birds and raise some of the questions I had been asking myself for decades.

Will any readers of the Newsletter who have more definite information about all this and/or can suggest answers to these questions kindly write to the Editor?

OCTOBER AT LAMMASINGHI

Trevor Price

Twenty five migrants have now (10th November) been noted at Lammasinghi. The arrival dates for the commoner species are given in the table, and are probably accurate to within two or three days. Notable is the number of blue chats captured (10), previously only recorded in Spring. Explanations for the differing arrival times are not obvious, but in the case of one bird, Blyth's Reed Warbler it has been shown that it stops to moult in the northern plains of India before proceeding south to its main wintering quarters. All birds arriving were in fresh plumage although some of the juveniles had not dropped their inner flight feathers.

One of the main aims of my project is to relate changes in the food supply to the arrival of these visitors. Vast numbers of earthworms appeared at the surface (presumably to mate?) during October and caused an influx of local birds, blackbird (*Turdus merula*), Spotted Babbler (*Pellorneum ruficeps*) and White-throated Ground Thrush (*Zoothera citrina cyanotus*) as well as forming the main diet of the migrant thrushes; the Orange-headed Ground Thrush (*Zoothera c. citrina*) and Pied Ground Thrush (*Zoothera wardii*).

However it is on the common Greenish Warbler that I am concentrating my study. So undoubtedly the star bird of the season so far was the occurrence of one ringed on the 6th April 1971 by a Bombay Natural History Society team and recaptured on the 11th October, making it at least six years old. The main passage of the Warblers was completed by the third week of October when several very young looking birds were caught. Conflicts and chases, never very common are now virtually non-existent. Each bird seems to defend a small territory in the tree tops, as well as wandering freely through the low bushes.

Coincident with the arrival of the main bulk of migrants most of the residents have been completing their moult and some (notably the shama, Tickell's Flycatcher and Black Spotted Yellow Tit (*Parus xanthogenys*)) appear to be setting up territories for the winter, as they are singing much more than in September.

The nest of the Longtail Jungle Warbler (*Prinia sylvatica*) referred to in my last article was vandalised just before the chick was due to fledge. An addled egg was found below it, so it appears that the abnormal clutch of two was intended to be one of three. The female went into a moult almost immediately, and the male is singing for less than ten minutes a day in total, compared with about four-five hours when the nest was occupied.

<u>Birds</u>	<u>1st record</u>	<u>Notable passage</u>	<u>Last record</u>
Wryneck (<i>Jynx torquilla</i>)*	7 Oct	- -	- -
Brown Shrike (<i>Lanius cristatus</i>)*	22 Sept	2nd week Oct	- -
Redbreasted Flycatcher (<i>Muscicapa parva</i>)*	18 Oct	- -	- -
Bluethroated Flycatcher (<i>Muscicapa ruberuloides</i>)	14 Oct	3rd,4th week Oct	28 Oct
Blyth's Red Warbler (<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>)*	21 Oct	- -	- -
Largebilled Warbler (<i>Phylloscopus magnirostris</i>)	29 Sept	1st 3 weeks Oct	21 Oct
Greenish Warbler (<i>Phylloscopus brochiloides</i>)*	28 Aug	1st 2 weeks Oct	- -
Rubythroat (<i>Erithacus calliope</i>)*	19 Oct	- -	- -
Bluechat (<i>Erithacus brunneus</i>)*	10 Oct	2nd week Oct	- -
Orangeheaded Ground Thrush ₁ (<i>Zoothera c. citrina</i>)	24 Oct	- -	- -
Scarlet Rosefinch (<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>)*	9 Nov	- -	- -
Grey Wagtail (<i>Motacilla caspica</i>)*	mid Aug	- -	- -
Forest Wagtail (<i>Motacilla indica</i>)	22 Sept	- -	25 Oct

* Birds known to be present on 10th November and therefore likely to over-winter.

1 Apart from one on 11th October.

PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRDS AS FOSTER PARENTS

S Ingalhallikar and Sanjay Kothari

In the second week of August 1976, in an open plot in Vithalwadi, about 3 kms from the centre of Poona City, a nest of a Purple-rumped Sunbird was seen hanging from a twig of a *Caesalpinia Sepiara* bush. The nest was at a height of about 5 ft. from the ground.

When the nest was first located, it contained two eggs. The eggs were white speckled with brown and in size equivalent to Red-vented Bulbul's eggs. The female sunbird was seen incubating the eggs.

A chick was first seen inside the nest on 26th August. It was dark brown in colour and appeared rather big for a sunbird's chick. The shape of its beak was also different. How the other egg was disposed off was not known; neither did we find the shells of the hatched egg. The possibility of brood parasitism had not occurred to us then.

On 16th September it was observed that the entrance hole was enlarged and the chick was not inside the nest. On an adjacent acacia (Babul) tree the female sunbird was seen feeding the chick which was now of the size of a red-vented bulbul minus tail. Its colour was dark grey with brown spots

on the chest. The gape was rich scarlet red. Wings were short and tail feathers undeveloped. It was weakly calling chee, chee, the call becoming harsher on the arrival of the foster parents. Almost every five minutes it was being fed by the female sunbird. The female was seen picking up something from near the acacia blossom. Evidently it could not be nectar for there is none in babul flowers. She was, however, observed to be bringing in nectar from the loranthus flowers. The female would sit by the side of the chick and feed it by inserting its beak into the open mandibles of the chick. The chick would quiver its wings and tail during feeding. The chick was seen flying from one tree to another within a radius of 10 to 15 feet from the nest. As the chick and the parents were not coming back to the nest, the same was removed by us.

In the last week of September both the parents were seen feeding the chick; the frequency of feeding had increased to about every two minutes. Again, the sunbirds were seen pecking at tender twigs of Babul. The tail of the young bird had become long and its colour lighter. The chest had become cross-barred with dark brown. The tail was also lightly barred with white and brown. It had become more active and could fly over a greater distance.

The chick was last seen on 30th September. In size it was bigger than a red-vented bulbul. In colour it was grey with a lighter chest cross-barred with dark brown. Tail-feathers were long and barred with white and dark grey. Its flight was like a large grey babbler; quick wing beats followed by a glide. It was low and silent. Its parents were still engaged in feeding it. The chick could not be located again in the same area after 30th September.

The following other birds were seen nesting in the same open plot: 1. Ashy Wren Warbler, 2. Tailor bird, 3. White-throated Munia, 4. Baya Weaver Bird, and 5. Red-vented Bulbul.

The following parasitic cuckoos were seen in the vicinity of the nest: 1. Koel (quite common), 2. Pied Crested Cuckoo, 3. Hawk-cuckoo (uncommon) and 4. Plaintive Cuckoo. The last was seen perching on the bush bearing the sunbirds' nest, only once i.e. on 23rd September.

In the second week of October a member of the Nature Club in National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla, also recorded a sunbird feeding a large bird. The NDA is situated across the river at a distance of six to seven miles from Vithalwadi.

CORRESPONDENCE:

BAR-HEADED GEESE

I read with interest your article on 'A Wood Owl and Bar-headed Goose' in the News letter of March '77. Bar-headed Goose, in fact, travels further south of Bangalore also.

Way back in 1968 when I was stationed in Tiruchirapalli (Tamilnadu) I came across a Forest Department note which said that the Bar-headed goose could be sighted in Pamban and in Devarayan lake, near Tiruchirapalli. This lake is about 10 km from Trichi on the Thanjavur road. I visited this lake in December 1968 thrice and on my third visit was able to spot a skein of Bar-headed geese landing. In 1975 a shot-gun enthusiast brought down one goose in a lake near Pudukottai, not far from Trichi.

S Theodore Baskaran

SALIM ALI'S NOTE BOOK

The excerpts from Salim Ali's Notebook have been particularly interesting, listing birds from an area that I do not know at all. However, I couldn't help wishing that he had put the common names of the birds as well as the Latin ones! Perhaps some kind fairy (the Editor) would do this for us!

Mrs Sara Jameson

I take this opportunity to put forth my observation on Elephanta Island in response to the Article "Thirtyfour years and Nine months After Salim Ali" by 'Anonymous'. I fully agree with the author's assessment of the island's potential as a bird sanctuary as well as a picnic resort.

The variety and abundance of vegetation cover offers good scope for food and roosting sites to the birds. I hope more varieties of trees and shrubs are planted especially the ones which grow well on the island. Subsequently more varieties of animals also in particular the arboreal ones, like the langur, giant squirrel etc. could be introduced.

However, the author has missed one important fact. The authorities had tried to build a reservoir by building a dam in the valley straddled by the two main hills on the island. However the effort was half-hearted and has been abandoned. I hope this project is completed properly. This would remove one important drawback of the island - lack of adequate fresh water supply in the lean months. This would not only provide the much needed fresh water supply to the fauna of the island but also add to its scenic beauty. It may also attract more varieties of water birds - especially the ones having a bias for fresh water.

SM Sample

BRAHMINY KITES

10 years ago there was a pair of Brahminy Kites at each of the 4 lakes near Jasdan and they used to nest regularly in the large Jamun trees below the dams at all the 4 lakes, Alansagar, Rajawadia, Revania and Panelia. Many new lakes have been built/completed in the last two years in the Jasdan area but somehow the Brahminy Kites have sharply declined in numbers and are now only rare and occasional visitors to lakes in the Jasdan area. I wonder if this decline in numbers is there in other parts of Gujarat and India.

Shivraj Kumar Khacher

WHAT IS THIS BIRD?

Size, shape & movements: like a Moorhen or Water-hen

Colour of plumage: uniform chocolate brown; no white, red or black anywhere nor any other colour.

Bill: yellow-green, with black tip

Legs: dull reddish

Locality: coarse grass & low bushes beside stream near Poona, seen on 5-3-1977

Could this be a female Water-cock (*Gallicrex cinerea*)?

Thomas Gay

EXTRACTS:

GROWING SUCCESS OF PEREGRINE REINTRODUCTION IN U.S.

(From World Wildlife Fund Press Release No.7/1977)

Morges, Switzerland - Growing success of reintroducing Peregrine falcons to areas of the United States where they had been wiped out by DDT has been reported to the World Wildlife Fund.

Dr Tom Cade, of Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology, reported that 42 young captive-bred Peregrines were released in 1976 making a total of 62 since 1974 when reintroduction started. He said that there was every reason to expect to raise well over 100 young in 1977 and to have reached 200 per year by 1978.

The young Peregrine are bred at the Cornell Laboratory and at another station opened in Colorado, which is specialising in the western sub-species. The World Wildlife Fund is providing financial support.

Two methods are used to put the birds into the wild. In the Western United States they are placed in the nests of wild Peregrines whose own eggs have failed to hatch. In the East it has been necessary to reintroduce the young Peregrines by adapting the methods of the Falconer for training birds called "hacking". Young birds are placed in a suitable nesting structure in broods of three to six before they can fly. They are guarded and fed until they can catch their own food. This usually takes about two months.

Dr. Cade stated that a total of 55 young Peregrines had been hacked at 10 sites in seven states. After losses for various reasons, including one killed by a human vandal, at least 37 became independent hunters.

Several birds released from hacking stations in 1975 returned during the breeding season in 1976 and pair formation and nesting attempts are expected this year.

The Peregrine falcon was probably the worst sufferer from the effects of the use of DDT pesticides in North America and Europe. The poisons got into the food of the falcons and accumulated in their bodies, causing direct deaths and breeding failure. Strict controls on use of DDT have been introduced now in most of the affected areas and it is hoped that the environment will gradually recover and support a new Peregrine population.

RARE MAURITIUS FALCON TAKES A STEP FROM THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION

(From WWF Press Release No.9/1977)

Morges, Switzerland - The Mauritius kestrel, probably the rarest bird of prey in the world, has increased its numbers to 13 following the successful fledging of five young.

David McKelvey, who is working for conservation of the kestrels (*Falco punctatus*) with support from the World Wildlife Fund, reports that he had the good fortune to witness one of the fledglings take to the air for the first time. The nest was three quarters of the way up a rocky outcrop, and the parent birds visited it and then coursed back and forth along the cliff face.

"The adults drifted away to the west across a wide valley, calling shrilly. In a few minutes I suddenly saw a third kestrel emerge from the hole and fly strongly out over the ravine. It then faltered and tried to soar, giving the impression that this business of flying was all very new. Regaining its sense of direction it returned to the cliff and rather ungracefully alighted in a thick shrub above the nest hole.

"The following morning I saw not only one but three fine, perfectly-feathered young, a bit shorter tailed than their parents, flying near the cliff face against a bright blue sky."

A second nest on an inaccessible ledge produced two young.

Hunting and destruction of their forest habitat have brought the kestrel to the brink of extinction, along with attacks on their nests by monkeys after eggs and young. Successful reproduction has only been achieved in the last few years when the birds chose nest sites which the monkeys could not get at. Preparations had been made to guard vulnerable nests.

Attempts are being made to breed the kestrel in captivity in Mauritius, so far without success, although the scientists involved remain optimistic, based on success in captive breeding of falcons elsewhere.

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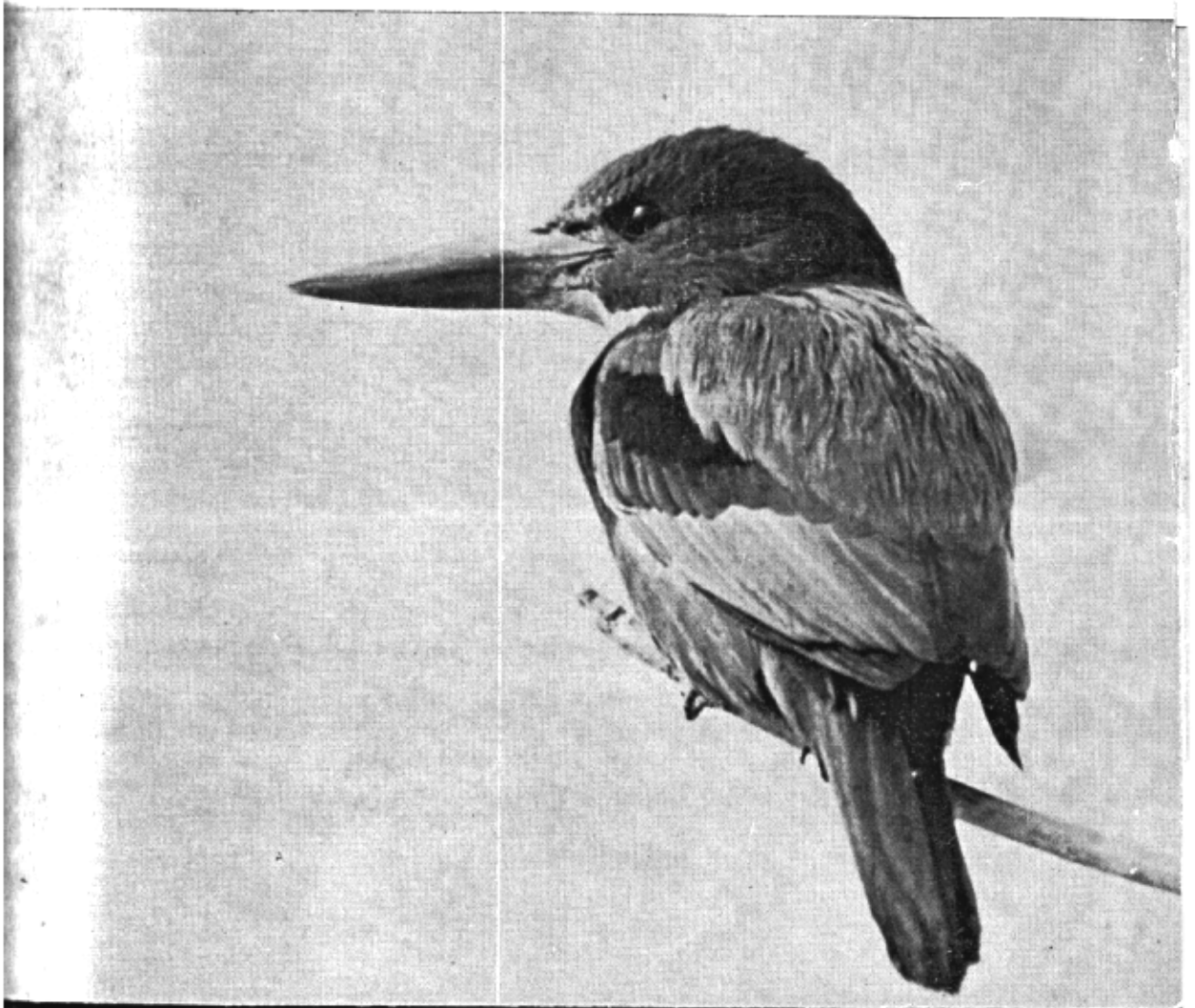
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J. D. West
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ANOTHER CRACK AT THE MOUNTAIN QUAIL

Salim Ali

The Mountain Quail, Ophrysia superciliosa, was initially described by J.E. Gray in 1846 from a live specimen believed to be from 'India' that had found its way to a menagerie in England. It was not until its discovery in the wild, many years later, that the type locality was fixed as Mussoorie. On many counts the bird remains as enigma to this day. In all there are only 10 specimens extant, 5 in the British Museum the rest in the USA. The only area from which it is known is the Kumaon Division of the W. Himalayas, all the specimens having been obtained between 1650 and 2100 m elevation -- at Jharipani (a little below Mussoorie), around Benog and Badhraj peaks behind Mussoorie, and on Sher-ka-danda peak near Naini Tal where the last known specimen was collected in 1876, i.e. just over a hundred years ago. Since then the bird seems to have vanished in thin air. In spite of fairly thorough combing of its known haunts, and of ecologically equivalent areas in the adjacent Himalayas, no further reports or specimens have come to light, and the bird continues a mystery. Since the Mountain Quail is not known to occur anywhere outside its restricted range in the Kumaon Himalayas it is obviously not a migrant as was conjectured. But if a resident, it is hard to understand why it has remained so exceedingly rare and little known. The taxonomic position of the species is equivocal. The structure of its wing is reminiscent of the Spurfowl (Galloperdix); the short stout bill, the

long lax plumage and the stiff bristle-like feathers on the forehead are features recalling the Blood Pheasant (Ithaginis); the bill and forehead bristles are also as in the Bush Quails (Perdicula). Likewise the sexes are also dissimilar. The male is dark slaty olive-brown overall, with distinctive black and white face markings and a broad white eyebrow; the female is largely cinnamon-brown with a pinkish grey face and a less prominent white eyebrow; the bill and feet in both sexes are red. Size between a Grey Quail and a Grey Partridge but tail relatively longer.

In 1936 while living in Dehra Dun I once spent several strenuous days in October searching for the Mountain Quail on the steep grassy slopes of Benog and Badhraj peaks, and around Dudhli but without a dog and maybe therefore without success. The birds were reported by the early collectors to flush from patches of tall grass in coveys of 5 or 6 only when almost trampled on, and to pitch into the grass again after a short heavy flight - therefore similar in behaviour again to the Bush Quail. It had become clear that without the aid of a good sporting dog, such as a pointer or a spaniel, our exertions were bound to remain fruitless. It is only after a lapse of 42 years that my next opportunity came for searching this needle in the haystack. During the interval the Mountain Quail has continued to remain a mystery. On 7 April 1977, accompanied by M. Osman, a keen and knowledgeable falconer of Dehra Dun and his trained springer spaniel we jeeped out to Cloud End, a spectacularly situated bungalow - a remnant from the hey-day of the British Koi hais - on the tip of a spur within easy reach of both Benog and Badhraj. Four hours were spent tramping up and down the steep sparsely scrubbed hillsides cut up by wooded nalas with a dense undergrowth of ringal bamboo, berberis, cotoneaster, Rubus and other brushwood. At this season the grass everywhere was close-cropped and there were no patches tall enough to hide the birds as reported by the earlier sportsmen-collectors. It may therefore be - assuming that the Mountain Quail has not already joined the Dodo - that the birds were keeping closely to the overgrown nalas. The usefulness of the dog was amply demonstrated by his flushing a cheer pheasant and 4 or 5 kaleej from the ravines which could easily have been missed otherwise. Most of the extant specimens of the Mountain Quail were collected during or soon after November when the grass on the opener hillsides would be taller after the monsoon and provide better cover. Thus it was perhaps the season of collection that originally led to the conjecture of the bird being a migrant. On the other hand, the specimen collected in June could equally suggest its being a resident species!

The re-discovery of the Mountain Quail should be one of the top priorities of naturalists living or holidaying in the Kumaon Himalayas possessed of sound wind and limb and preferably also of trained sporting dogs. After the monsoon, when the grass on the hillsides is tall enough for adequate cover, would perhaps be the best time for a determined search. The Mountain Quail is a challenge: Who will accept it?

OF JUVENILE AND BREEDING PLUMAGES

Madhav Gadgil

The pattern of variation in the plumages of juveniles and adults, of males and females, and of birds in and out of breeding seasons makes for a fascinating study. At the dullest end of this spectrum are birds like the India Myna which as adults carry the same plumage regardless of the sex all round the year. The juvenile plumage too is almost the same as that of the adults, though there are a few minor differences. This dullness is no doubt traceable to the fact that the Mynas are married for life, and the competition for mates is therefore at a low key. The peafowl of course is the other extreme with the male developing its magnificent train every breeding season. This extravagant splendour is again traceable to the fact that Peafowl indulge in a rather promiscuous sexual life, with a single male often mating with several females with the consequent keen sexual competition.

I would like to examine here two stages in between this spectrum, which first started me thinking on this problem. This happened last year while I was watching the grand spectacle of hundreds of pairs of water birds breeding at the Ranganathittu bird sanctuary in Mysore district. The species which breed here include the Night and the Pond Herons, the Cattle, the Little, Intermediate and the Large Egrets, the Openbill Stork, the White Ibis, the Darter and the Little Cormorant. All the species are monogamous, at least for a single breeding season, and both the male and the female participate in rearing the chicks. Of these the Pond Heron and all the Egrets don wedding dresses. These include a variety of plumes on the head, neck, breast and back, and sometimes coloured legs. But the two sexes are pretty much alike. The two sexes are also alike in the case of the Night Heron, the Openbill Stork, the White Ibis, the Darter and the Little Cormorant none of which sport a special breeding plumage. It is perhaps notable that the pond Heron and the Egrets which do sport a nuptial coat are all solitary feeders, and all build their nests scattered, interspersed with other species. The Night Heron, the Openbill Stork, the White Ibis, the Darter and the Little Cormorant are more of flock feeders and build their nests clustered together by species - living as Salim Ali has put it, in mohallas. But we won't enter into the possible significance of this correlation now. What I wish to point out here is that, with the exception of the Little Cormorant, all the species which do not possess a special breeding plumage possess a distinct juvenile plumage, while in all the species with a special breeding plumage, the juvenile plumage is like that of non-breeding adults. The net result of course is that in all the cases the juveniles look different from the breeding adults.

The heronry at Ranganathittu is packed full of breeding pairs living cheek to jowl with each other. In this world of standing room only, there is quite intense competition for nesting space, with quarrels continually erupting amongst neighbours. Any potential competitor at the nest is therefore apt to evoke a strong aggressive response. In fact, it is known that the pairs indulge in elaborate appeasement displays every time they

meet at the nest, to keep down the aggression that is apt to boil up when an adult suddenly lands at the nest. This, I presume, is the clue to the distinctness of the juvenile plumage in all the cases from that of adults in breeding condition. In birds the chicks grow rapidly and attain adult size before they leave the nest. Under these conditions, they are likely to evoke an aggressive response from the parents unless they look different in some way. Such an aggressive response, if evoked could be fatal, for birds are often cannibalistic and do easily peck and kill and eat chicks of their own species - as happens with the Herring Gull. The distinct juvenile plumage where the adults do not change into a breeding plumage is an obvious adaptation to signal to the adults that they are just kids - and not serious competitors.

THE INTERIOR

Jamal Ara

Before I ventured into the interior of the 300 square mile Kolhan forests, I had a look at the map. The area was encompassed, a rectangular block within two ranges, a road and a river. The threshold of this interior was a station on the railway skirting the forest on the north. I thrilled as I saw a thin straggling red line showing a road plunge away from the railway into that neatly bounded block of green. The deepest inside was where I wanted to go, and did.

The forest country, however, was deceptive. The threshold, the railway station of Gailkera on the direct Calcutta-Bombay line, itself lay sunk in a hollow completely ringed by densely-wooded hills. The railway and a road entered from the East, slipping between two ranges where the geologic process building the land had forgotten to seal the ramparts of this amphitheatre. The error had stolen from it the significance of the interior and man had come in with his pneumatic drill and tunnelled the watershed to the west to turn it into a corridor for a cross-country route to go through.

The Grackle and the Large Pied Hornbill were aware of this sacrilege by man. They shunned the amphitheatre, though only four miles from the threshold in the concealed valley of Kendbai one met them. And this too when the soft shales and shade-sheltered North-facing slopes of the girdling hills nourished dense forest, and, as I discovered later, the harder states on the other side, facing south and more exposed to the sun, supported only a thin growth.

Yet the Grackle and the Large Pied Hornbill beckoned Southward, out of the amphitheatre into the adjoining labyrinth, and I took the straggling trail that had appeared so promising on the map. We went in that particular year, 1948, because a friend had built a bridge on the road leading into the amphitheatre and we could take a little longer on the tour, sure of being able to return by car to the district headquarters even if the rains broke early. Because of the new bridge there was a touch of pioneering about that 50-day trip and that accentuated the sense of plunging into the interior, even though it lay just off a very much used railway.

It was evening when we first turned into Kendbai enclave; the Grackles were flying south heading for places beyond the Mutkodwar Pass. We climbed the road up to where the wall-like range of hills was cleft, and surveyed the panting road as it fell into the valley on the other side, losing itself among the traditional seven hills of aboriginal lore. The shadows of evening rendered the scene stranger than one of forests and hills usually is. It was dense, forbidding, unlit. One is reluctant to enter a dark house at evening and so we turned back from the Pass, though the homing Grackle and the Hornbill were flying south.

We took the trail the following morning. As we topped the Pass we flushed a crested serpent eagle. It, too, flew south, large and menacing, with its ominous shadow flung across our bonnet. The road wound like a corkscrew deep into the valley, so thickly wooded that we could only suspect a stream at the bottom but never saw one. All the while the Eagle loomed above like Sindbad's Rock in the valley of snakes and diamonds. What gems were we after? No exploration is adventurous enough if it is not a treasure-trove. The gems I brought are here, it was like Poe's Bug - it made me a convert to Chotanagpur, for it is more than a place on a map, it is a cult.

We soon lost interest in the Eagle. We were attracted by a lovely Ipomea, white and virginal, a variety we had never seen before. It wreathed a small coppiced stump by the side of the road - a hoard of flowers plugged into a stand instead of a vase. This arrangement was decoratively more suitable to a jungle interior. Soon there were a flock of the Grey-headed Mynas swarming a teak plantation and an Orange-headed Ground Thrush trotting about a clear felled coupe, at home and confident, mocking our alternate feelings of entering a strange house and adventuring into remote forest country.

We passed a couple of Peacocks and were in a bird-lover's paradise at Patung. The lunch-hour was also a feast of song and plumage, as we squat on the grass by the Deo River and ate our meal. There were Treepies, Grey Tits, White-eyes, Bulbuls, Sunbirds to name only a few.

The Forest-Rest House we had avoided because its white walls and red ochre plinth were too loud. In the forest even the most gorgeous colours are subdued. The White-breasted Kingfisher shoots into your eye; its blue and chestnut but only for a split second and if you want to see it again you have to search and discover. The bright eyes of the Peacock's tail skimmer against the under-growth one moment and the next are frozen into invisibility. The shower of golden flowers that the Amaltas cassia is, or the scarlet crown of the Flame of the Forest creeper are hardly visible without a search. Beauty is for those who seek it, and not an exhibitionist parade obtruding on the unquesting. And yet the colours are bright and vivid - it is the scale on which the forest is built that makes the difference, put everything into tone, a rather shy and quiet one. The same flowers in a garden or park would be different, and hence to the forest - lover flowering trees are never the same outside their natural habitat. There is something petty, showy, and vulgar about them elsewhere.

We crossed the river, forded it with our small car hard put to the job, and took the trail where it would lead. Now we were truly in the interior for none of the two rivers isolating us from the main roads was bridged. The road soon petered out and we went bowling along a grassy track for some time before a thick growth of *Holarrhenas* rendered further progress impossible and we realized that we had wandered off the road. We reversed and found the road - a grassy track all right but one which was "weeded" of tree saplings once each year and so was not impenetrable. We were at Rajabassa by tea time.

The forest as I have said earlier was thin at Rajabassa, but the place was remote. In the bungalow's log-book there was no entry in the preceding three years. In the 24 years the bungalow had been in existence there had not been more than a dozen visitors. So here we were where I had longed to go, out in the wilds where few had been before. But my pleasure was not provoked only by a sense of uniqueness. The place was beautiful, a small brick-coloured cottage placed where two wooded spurs had failed to keep their promise of meeting. And through that window of mountainous hesitation the glass shutters of the bungalow winked across the broad Karo river to another block of forests walled up a towering blue range. The forest went all round in straight lines, coming close to the rear of the bungalow but leaving a long rectangular patch of grass in the front. That patch was fringed with red Oleanders and for the fortnight we stayed there we lived with birds.

Along the woods fringing the open were three pairs of Magpie-Robins, contrastingly black and white in their breeding plumage. Each male had his favourite song perch and the territory of each was sharply marked out by boundaries of song. In the morning we were woken from our beds in the open by their defiant songs. From perches on swaying twigs two males, facing each other, would pour out in passionate vehemence the sweetest of invectives. Think, even male jealousy can be poetic! The Shama had a perch at the far end of the lawn, where a small stream deepened and broadened into a pond. Its black and white tail, longer than that of the Magpie Robin, was set off against the deep chestnut of its under parts, which with an artist's customary bad manners it was fond of displaying. As it flicked its tail to flaunt its reddish-brown underneath, it sang a rich tune, which had all the lushness of the forest distilled into melody. Its song was humid, tropical and luxuriant.

The nights were loud with the calls of three Nightjars and at dusk as we sat on the lawn, we saw them floating about and hunting in ghostly silence. Such soundless flight was it, that our rectangular space bounded by the sheer walls of the forest all round, with the small bungalow lost in the veils of the evening's hushed intimacies, seemed a haunted interior.

But the eerie silence was frequently rent by the loud calls of the Brain Fever Bird and the Indian Cuckoo; the latter had long spells of monomania repeating "Crosswords Puzzle", it seemed to have pinned its hope on a big puzzle prize. The Hindustani rendering of its call is "Utho Dekho", which

means "wake up and see", we did see that elusive bird, but not getting up from our sleep at night. We ran it down in the day, a contrast of rich brown and creamy white, with a black band in the tail, because like the other cuckoo it was loud and clamorous at all times.

Daylight was more memorable for the gems of colour, like stones inlaid, that of scintillated in the jungle's half-light - that of the small Minivet, ruby-like with the mating season's passion, the turquoise Roller and the emerald chloropsis. There were also the Gold-fronted Chloropsis, the crimsonbreasted Barbet, the Golden and the Pied Marhatta Woodpeckers.

The most-flashy birds, however, were the Large Minivets, then in their breeding plumage - the male all scarlet and the females all yellow. They used to swoop down on our open bit at all times of the day. Equally colourful were the Blackheaded and Golden Orioles. I have never seen as many Orioles in all my years of birdwatching. There would be seven or eight of them in flight together, circling about the bungalow. It was something about nesting no doubt, but I have not yet understood the significance of that communal wheeling.

More festively plumaged than any other bird, however, was the Paradise flycatcher, with its black crest, chestnut coat and white tail hanging in streamers. There were several of this species and it was usual to see three or four together at the pool. Sombre and dignified was the Large Racket-tailed Drongo sailing gracefully about and always solitary.

Such was our interior, but we felt keenly the absence of flowers. Barleria reared up the roots of trees in foams of blue, like Dado to Walls of green fluted with chocolate columns of bark. The grass on the floor of the clearing was ripe and brown with summer, dotted like a carpet with flowering tiny white cups and yellow stars. But one can tire of blue and green, and the other colours were so insignificant in the decorative scheme of Nature at Rajabassa. We did not like the look up to the wide sky always for red and yellow flashing of bird's wings. So we searched the teeming undergrowth and brought two saplings of Amaltas and planted them below the bedroom windows. To get relief from the uniformity of the broad sal leaf form, we put in the pinnate toon on the perimeter of the lawn. And I said to myself in five years it should be a still more beautiful place.

Yet we missed something more; the Grackle had not come all the way down south with us. They had for some curious reason (bird distribution is so erratic) stopped by the Deo river and the Large Pied Hornbill equally inexplicably insisted on flying every evening further away across the Karo into a different forest block. There were plenty of chattering Common Myna and Common Grey Hornbill, but common and grey and brown are depressing attributes for neighbours and every ornithologist at heart is a snob, for he or she is ever seeking the acquaintance of the rare and the distinguished. The Grackle were distinguished in their black coats; the pied attire of the Large Hornbill was equally formal and courtly; besides the latter are rather uncommon. These did not share the interior with us and I felt sad. Only a pair of River Tern in the Karo meander consoled me;

3

they were hardly native but had made the place their home and laid eggs in small scrapes on the sand in hurried anxiety about the coming monsoon flood. And the continuous flapping of their grey and white slim bodies up and down the river from morning till evening lent the right note of monotony which belongs to domesticity.

NESTING OF LARGE PIED WAGTAIL (MOTACILLA MADERASPATENSIS)

Zafar Futehally

It is curious that the incubation period of the Large Pied Wagtail is unknown in spite of the fact that it is such a friendly bird, and builds so close and even within human habitations. Since discovering this lacuna I decided to keep a close watch on the bird this season.

On 21-3-1977 at 10.00 a.m. there were two eggs in the Wagtail nest built inside the pump cover of our well. I presume that the first egg was laid on 20th March, and the second on 21st, since the nest was empty on the morning of the 19th. On 22-3-1977 there were 3 eggs noticed. Only one bird (obviously the female) was seen going in and coming out of the nest. The male only kept a watch around the nesting site, and flew back and forth with the female at the time when the nest was being constructed, and later during her feeding forays.

At 8.15 a.m. on the morning of 4th April there were two chicks, and one egg, hence the incubation period - from 22nd March to 4th April - is 14 days. I did not however investigate on the 21st so that it could be 13 days. Unfortunately, the chicks appear to have been eaten by a Rock lizard of which there are too many around.

CORRESPONDENCE

BAYA NEST

MS Ramamoorthi

Ever since I had gone through the article with the caption "Like trailing Clouds of Glory" in the Newsletter issue of October 1976 (Vol XVI No 10), there has been some itching in my mind that I should write something about the baya or weaver bird and its nest.

I agree with most of the facts about the baya, but I do not agree that the baya's nest has two compartments and two entries.

As the baya is one of the most common birds found throughout our country, it is unlikely for a birdwatcher not to have come across a baya colony in any one of his birdwatching rounds.



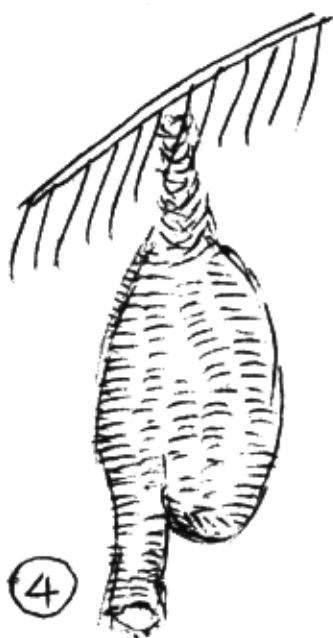
①



②



③



④



⑤

- 1) $\frac{1}{4}$ built nest
- 2) $\frac{1}{2}$ built nest
- 3) $\frac{3}{4}$ built nest
- 4) Completed nest
- 5) Cut away section of a completed nest

In our part of the country - the coastal plains of Tamilnadu, the bayas usually select a wild date palm or a palmyra for their nests. But occasionally I have found baya nests in overhanging boughs of thorny trees over water. They often prefer a tree growing in the vicinity of the temple of a village deity, probably because the branches or leaves are not cut indiscriminately. I have collected many baya nests that have fallen from the trees and some of them are still with me. I want to assure our readers that each nest has one chamber and one entry only. I hope all our readers will agree with me.

I have observed baya nests as they are being built. If anybody happens to notice a half-built nest two cavities partially separated by a middle wall are usually seen. But one of the cavities is woven closed to form a chamber and the other is made into a tubular entrance.

I am able to form an idea as to how a birdwatcher conceives that a baya's nest has two compartments but not able to do so as to what makes him think that it has two entries.

I do not presume to be an artist, but I will try to sketch the figure of a baya's nest as it is built in stages. (see illustrations on page 9).

The baya is quite a common bird in the Cauvery delta. I have noticed them building nests on two seasons during the year. Many birds seem to build more than one nest in the same season. They start building nests from the middle of January, and it coincides with the beginning of the Samba (long term paddy) harvest. They also start building nest from the beginning of July. Then it coincides with the rivers and the network of irrigation canals receiving the freshes from the south-west monsoon.

Today (10-2-1977) I visited a baya colony to ascertain myself as to how a baya knots the first strands to the branches or leaves. Luckily I saw two birds fixing the first strands. The bird made holes in the palmleaf and thrust the strands through the holes. After a lot of strands are sewn to the leaf more strands are stuck to them by working the strands in and out downwards. The strands used are fellings from the leaves of the palm tree itself.

SACRED BIRDS OF THIRUKKALUKUNDRAM

I expect many others will have responded to KK Neelakantan's appeal for further information about the sacred birds of Thirukkalukundrum. Probably the Chingleput District Gazetteer contains much more information but meanwhile here is a copy of the entry under Tirukkaz Hukkumam in the third edition of Vol.3 of Balfour's Cyclopaedia of India (1885):

TIRUKKAZ HUKKUNRAM, a temple 36 miles S. of Madras, well known to Europeans who visit it to see the kites fed at noon. The temple is now devoted to the worship of Siva, but an inspection of the inscriptions shows that it was once a Jain edifice, and

Taranatha, in his history, in Tibetan, of Indian Buddhism, mentions this temple under the name of Paxithirtha, or, in the Tibetan corresponding name, Bird convent - Mr Burnell on Inscriptions, 1870, p.6.

In India Temples, first published in 1935, Odette Bruhl calls the place Pakshithirtham and remarks:

Hundreds of pilgrims climb daily to the summit of this rock to see Brahmins feeding the sacred birds.

It must have been in the 'forties that I climbed up one hot day, hurrying to arrive by noon rather than 11-30 (as far as I remember). Anyway the birds came in punctually and fed delicately on boiled rice. They were said to commute daily from Benares but approached from the south-west.

According to Epigraphica Indica III, p.279, a Tamil inscription found at Tirukalikunram is 'one of the oldest yet (1894-5) discovered'. But the inscription only records a grant of land and does not mention the birds.

RE Hawkins

I have gone through the article of Prof KK Neelakantan about the "sacred Birds of Thirukkalukundaram". I have also read Dr Salim Ali's view about the sacred birds in the Vol I of the Hand Book.

In this connection I have to say that I visited Thirukkalukundaram in October 1956 when I was on way to pilgrimage to Rameshwaram with my family members. At that time two Neophrons came about 12 noon and ate "prasadam" from the bowl offered by the priest. The birds came from a distance. They first looked as two dots in sky and then they slowly descended first on the roof of the temple and then at the place where priest was sitting with prasadam amidst a large crowd of men, women and children. The birds fearlessly ate their share, cleaned their beaks on the stone and flew away.

This place has an ancient tradition. The place is mentioned as "Pakchi Tirtha" in the "Puranas". It may be inferred on this ground that the birds are coming here for more than one thousand years. It is said that two Rishis come daily in the form of birds from Himalayas. Even if we do not believe this story, this is no small matter that priests have maintained that tradition for such a long time. It is said that several pairs of birds are kept a few kilometres away from the sacred rock and two are released at a time, when the birds die the other that were tamed previously take their place. In captivity these birds become habituated to the food that later offered to them at the temple.

With regard to the question why only two birds come and why they are not in company with the other wild birds of that area, it may be said that the wild birds cannot venture near the crowd of people.

It may be mentioned here that sometimes only one bird comes and also there is a gap of a few days as mentioned by Prof Nalankantan. But after narrating all this it may be said that the mystery remains. How the wild birds are trained? and how they are 'conditioned' to come to that rock for so many centuries. I hope other readers will also shed some light over this mystery.

Kamashwar Singh

AT HOME

In Bhuj, almost on all sundays, we go to nearby places for bird observation. Any visiting birdwatcher is most welcome to accompany us for birdwatching. Please contact: (i) Shantilal N Varu, C/o. Office of the Executive Engineer, Western Kutch Irrigation Division, Camp area, Bhuj (Phone: 77), (ii) Navin N Bapat C/o. District Treasury Officer, Opp: Jai-Hind Talkies, Bhuj (Kutch) (phone: 15).

W A N T E D

One binocular (foreign make), coated, 7x50 or 8x30, in good condition. Please inform: Shantilal N Varu, Junavas, Pipda Street, Madhapur (Kutch-Bhuj) 370 020.

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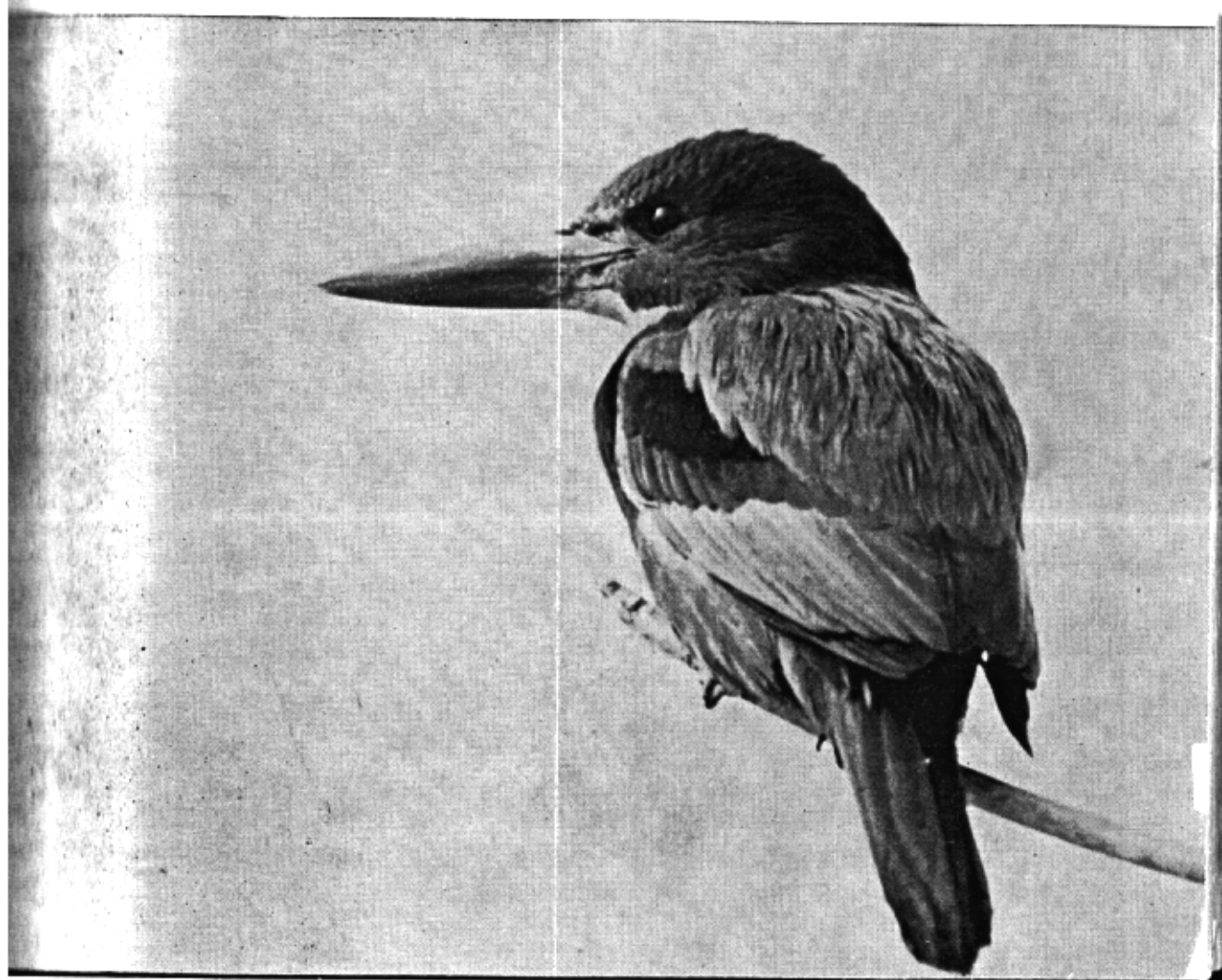
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*to Mrs Sasa
13/11/1977*

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER FOR
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THE NEOPHRON VULTURES OF THIRUKKALUKUNDRAM

Gift Siromoney

Professor KK Neelakantan in his recent article on the sacred birds of Thirukkalukundram has raised a number of queries and has aroused the interest of the readers. Some of his queries are the following: Was it only for a few days in the third week of November 1976 that the birds kept away from the temple? If not, and the vultures have totally given up the habit, what is the reason for it? Are the birds which had kept up the ritual dead? Would they have died simultaneously? Are there any scavenger vultures surviving in the area?

If the vultures had really stopped coming one might even attribute it to the increased use of pesticides by the local farmers. However I wish to assure the readers that the birds are alive and well and that they are busy bringing up a young one!

I climbed up the Thirukkalukundram hill, which is about 500 feet high, with a camera but without my binoculars which had gone for cleaning. There are steps going up to the very top. At the summit there is a seventh century

Siva temple with beautiful sculptures in the sanctum. Over this small temple has been built a tower or vimanam. The entrance to the temple is reached by flights of steps. At the foot of the steps, on the eastern side, there is an open area with bare rock which is set apart for feeding the birds. About two hundred pilgrims from different parts of the country had gathered to witness the birds. At 1055 hrs. I saw an adult bird taking off from the temple tower. On closer inspection I saw a juvenile bird in a nest which was visible from the steps leading to the temple entrance. The temple tower remained hidden by trees from the view of the pilgrims gathered at the foot of the steps to witness the birds. The nest was on the northern side towards the western corner. There was enough flat surface on the cornice for the large nest and it was partly sheltered by the spherical shikara of the tower.

On an earlier visit I had noticed the Neophron breeding in a nest on the northern side of the same tower. The breeding of the birds on the same hill was reported some time in 1957 in the Sunday edition of the Madras Mail.

Let me narrate the incidents that took place on April 27, 1977. 1120 hrs. Two men carrying a large brass vessel with rice pudding arrived. They entered the enclosure meant for feeding the birds. One of them persuaded the spectators not to be in the way of the flight path of the birds and asked them to go to the special enclosure set apart for spectators. One of the men who had come with the food for the birds, sat down facing east, on a wooden plank which was placed on the bare rock. The large vessel with a spoon, and a smaller vessel were kept in front of him. A circular metal tray and small metal dish were also kept on the rock in front of him. He held an ordinary umbrella over his head for protection against the sun. The man was not the presiding priest as observed by Dr Salim Ali. He was not wearing the sacred thread. He had taken over the feeding from his late uncle who used to do the honours.

1140 hrs. A Neophron vulture made its appearance. There were Pariah Kites also in the air.

1148 hrs. Two vultures could be seen. The umbrella was folded and kept behind. The man tried to attract the attention of the birds by knocking the metal dish on the rock as well as by slightly lifting and letting go the metal tray on the rock. The birds did not alight.

1203 hrs Two birds were sighted again.

1217 hrs One bird was sighted.

1220 hrs One bird was sighted. The birds usually came from the plains from the north eastern side and rose up with the hot air current over the hill.

1231 hrs. One bird came up from the plains carrying what appeared to be offal. The way in which it carried it in its beak gave me the impression that it was carrying the entrails of some animal with a part of an intestine of the length of about fifty centimetres.

1240 hrs. A bird came from the direction of the nest which was not visible from where I was standing.

1250 hrs. Two birds were sighted. Each time a bird was sighted the man tried to draw its attention by making noise with the tray and the dish.

1310 hrs. The pilgrims were getting a little restless and so was the man. He got up and sat down again. Two birds were seen once again. One bird carried some thing in its beak which looked like offal. The bird disappeared in the direction of the nest.

1315 hrs. A bird flew away from the direction of the nest. The man got up and walked about.

1318 hrs. Two birds were sighted again and the man rushed back to his seat.

1325 hrs. The man got restless. So did the pilgrims. The man got up and sat down after some time.

1354 hrs. Many pilgrims left. The man and his assistant left with the food and the vessels.

During the three hours of waiting I could see Pariah Kites, the Striated Swallow and the House Swift flying close to the man.

The man assured me that the birds would not come again that day. I looked at the notes I had taken and reckoned that the birds took about 50 minutes to reappear. I rushed up the flight of steps and stationed myself at a convenient spot from which to take photographs.

1403 hrs. A bird reached the nest.

1409 hrs. The bird flew away.

1425 hrs. A bird could be seen at a distance.

1432 hrs. A single bird. An aggressive male monkey, one of the many monkeys in the place, tried to attack me!

1458 hrs. A single bird.

1508 hrs. An adult seen in the nest. It must have just alighted.

1515 hrs. The adult still in the nest. Its tail could be seen from outside. Two 'shots' rang out. They were probably from some well being deepened by dynamite charges. The bird was not disturbed.

1521 hrs. The adult bird left the nest.

1526 hrs. The juvenile could be seen clearly. Its beak appeared lighter in colour in contrast to the neck feathers which were blackish. The wings were blackish with a dirty white patch. The chest was blackish. The juvenile spread its wings and flapped them vigorously as though about to take off. It made a harsh call which I noted down as di kite dim. The vultures are believed to be always silent. No calls have been reported so far.

1530 hrs. Juvenile still walking about the edge of the nest.

1531. It shook its head and settled down! After I made some enquiries of the local people and the men connected with the feeding of the birds I found that there was some kind of conspiracy! No local man would admit that the birds were not that regular. It was not admitted that the birds did not come for four days in a row some time back. Over the period of years I had formed the opinion that the birds do not come regularly at the appointed time of 1130 to 1200 hrs. Before climbing the hill I had made enquiries whether the birds had come early or late the previous day. Some said that it did come for food but was late. Late I found that the birds had not come for food even the previous day, a fact which many were unwilling to admit. The only way of collecting any reliable information is to assign the work to some one who is willing to study the habits of the bird so that he can observe them daily for a year. Collecting information from the local people is not of much value. Even the local people agree that on many occasions only one bird came for the rice pudding and not two. There are photographs showing a man feeding one bird.

The practice of the bird being fed by an attendant must have gone on for a long period but it is difficult to find out for how long. In the Chingleput District Manual written about a hundred years ago there is a reference to this practice.

"Every day two birds of the kite species come to the mountain and are fed by an attendant Brahmin. The same two are believed to have come from Benares to receive this daily dole from time immemorial."

However the inscriptions found on the temples of Thirukkalukundram do not make any reference to this practice. The inscriptions are from the seventh century A.D. to the end of the fifteenth century. In Tamil literature the place is referred to as Kalukkundram, the vulture-hill, from the seventh or eighth centuries A.D. Except for the place name there is no other reference. In the Tiruvilayaadal Puranam of the sixteenth century there is a reference to a place, normally identified as Thirukkalukundram, where two vultures (instead of kaluga, the word gangam is used to denote the birds) did tapas or penance. In a hundred pillar mandapa assignable to c. 1600 A.D. there is a representation of two birds placing a garland on a Siva linga. That representation found in a local temple does not show the birds being fed.

There are many legends of the Siva linga being worshipped by various animals and birds. Here it is quite possible that a long time ago a pair of vultures had taken shelter in a seventh century Pallava temple called the oru kal mandapa near the top and the legend of the two vultures that worshipped the Siva linga could have grown.

We hope that more work will be done on the Neophron Vultures in the near future.

INTERSPECIFIC ASSEMBLAGE OF BIRDS

Anil Mahabal

The three contexts in which birds of different species come together are mixed communal roosts, mixed breeding colonies and mixed feeding flocks. While observing the social behaviour of Indian Mynas, from October 1975 to September 1976, I came across such interspecific assemblages of birds around Poona (Maharashtra) in six different localities. All these assemblages were in the range of 10-20 kms. from the city. These gatherings were found to be away from human habitations and mostly on the Banyan trees (Ficus bengalensis L.) which were fully loaded with figs. Interestingly all these assemblages were located near watery patches like nallas, canals, or river sides. It was noticed that these gatherings were permanent only during winter and summer while in the rainy season (June-September) they were completely absent. This season of assemblies coincides with the fruiting season of Ficus trees.

About nineteen bird species at such interspecific assemblages were observed during the period of this study. Crimson breasted Barbets, Red vented Bulbuls, Indian Mynas and Brahminy Mynas were the most common participants at such gatherings. Koels, Golden Orioles, Red whiskered Bulbuls, House Crows, Grey Tits, House Sparrows, Common green Bee-eaters, Small Minivets, Red-starts, Common Indian Rosefinches and several international and local migrants like Rosy Pastors and Common Green Pigeons were also associated on certain occasions. Birds like Rose-ringed Parakeets, Blossom headed Parakeets and Jungle Crows were also seen occasionally. It will be noticed that most of these species are frugivorous or omnivorous, while a few are insectivorous.

What was notable was that these mixed species flocks tended to concentrate on only one or two of the various fig trees which were in fruit at any given time. Thus, it was not as if the birds had simply come together on one or two trees which were in fruit. As several trees used to be in fruit at any one time, the birds would have been dispersed over these if no further mixed flocking tendencies were involved. Rather, the birds of all these various species seem to be specially attracted to each other and come together in one large flock on certain favourite trees like the Banyan.

ATTRACTING SUNBIRDS

Abraham Verghese

Sunbirds take almost the same place in the old World tropics as humming birds do in those of the new World. These birds are much more lively and attractive and fanciers prefer them to humming birds, although the latter are more unique and varied. It is for this reason that for some time it has been possible to import sunbirds particularly the African varieties to Europe and to keep them in captivity.

Sunbirds frequent gardens which have flowering trees and shrubs. One of their favourite haunt for nectar is the Malaviscus plant (Malvaviscus arboreus),

which is a shrub distantly related to the Hibiscus, growing over 4 metres, with long bright red flowers which remain half closed. Both purple Sunbird and Purple rumped Sunbird visit these flowers and take to the nectar sac by directly puncturing at the base of the flower, instead of probing into the flower. Such a 'short-cut' has been previously described by Salim Ali in case of Hibiscus as early as 1932 (JBNHS 35: 573-605).

The importance of this shrub lies in the fact that it can be easily propagated with stem cuttings, and it adapts to a wide range of environmental conditions. The only attention it needs is a good pruning during winter. So this easily grown shrub is an ideal plant to recommend to gardeners, especially in urban areas where distribution of sunbirds depend on the availability of favourable gardens which can afford a good supply of nectar besides shelter. I could persuade a few of my friends who are fortunate enough to own a garden in Bangalore to plant these cuttings, and when the flowers bloom, I'm sure I can introduce the sunbirds to them.

HOUSE CROWS (CORVUS SPLENDENS, VIELLOT): A BENEFICIAL BIRD

AK Chakravorthy

Termites (or Isoptera) which are social insects, though popularly called White ants are not true ants, but only have some striking features like say polymorphism (differentiation into different castes like queen, workers and soldiers) in common. These different castes constitute a termite community and colonize and live in a termitarium. Usually after the first rain, these take to either diurnal or nocturnal swarming, (depending on the species) a process by which large numbers of male and female leave the termitarium and establish a new one. At the time of swarming when they emerge from the termitarium they are largely preyed on by birds, lizards and small mammals, causing high mortality, and if sufficient numbers of both sexes survive, a new colony is established.

On the evening of 26th August 1975, after a good shower, a diurnal swarm was seen at a termitarium near Bangalore. Besides the author, this attracted a party of 6 House Crows which descended on the termitarium and began their feast on the emerging termites.

Concentrating on one bird, the feeding rate was timed at 20 termites per minute. In spite of these 6 Crows feeding, many termites survived which goes to show that these termites emerged from the termitarium much faster than the rate at which the crows devoured them. This possibly in termites is a means to ensure some survivors, which could establish a new colony. Another interesting observation was that the wings of the termites stuck to the sides of the crow's bill and was not swallowed. This later was rubbed off the bill on the nearby telegraph pole.

Crows are obviously a limiting factor for termite population build-up and the founding of new colonies. It is here that crows join hands with man in his warfare against termites, and their activity is beneficial for the countryside and farmlands. (except in Airstrip - R.K. Bhatnagar, Newsletter; Vol.XV No.8 October 1975).

THE GREY HEADED MYNAH

Kameshwar Pd Singh

The Grey headed Mynah is a bird which is a little difficult to observe. It always sits in the topmost branches of the tree. But recently I have had a good chance to watch this bird in winter months.

In front of my house there are a few Lime Trees (*Tilia vulgaris*). These trees seem to be imported from Europe during the English period. They shed their leaves completely in mid-December and the trees remain leafless till the end of January.

The Grey headed Mynahs are regular visitors of these trees, and it is easy to observe them with the aid of binoculars on the leafless branches. As there are no flowers or fruits their main activity is 'search for insects' hidden behind the bark. They seem to be very partial to hunting spiders. This was also confirmed by a white headed race of this mynah which is also a winter visitor to south Bihar. This white faced mynah (*S.M. Blythii*) was kept as a cage bird and it ate all kinds of house spiders with relish when they were brought to it. Of course this myna cannot be kept as a cage bird for a long time because they are essentially insectivorous, and it is difficult to provide them with sufficient insects in the cage.

The Grey headed Mynah is also partial to Banyan and Silk Cotton trees. They are very difficult to observe in the thick foliage of the Banyan tree without the aid of binoculars.

They usually chatter occasionally but they also have a pleasant song which sounds like the song of the purple sunbirds. On the basis of my observation I can say that the Grey headed Myna is more an insect eating bird than a vegetarian and spiders are its favourite food. Other bird watchers may verify my observations and express their opinions about the food of this mynah.

I have never seen this mynah during summer months, i.e. from March to September. I think that the Grey headed *S. malabaricus* race is also migratory. One thing which seems to me very mysterious is the migration of the white-headed race to north India in winter? The Birds migrate to warmer regions in winter but this bird strangely enough migrates to colder regions in winter. I don't know if there are other birds which migrate to colder places in winter, i.e. to places which are much colder than their usual habitation. Perhaps other birdwatchers may be able to give some explanation about this behaviour which seems to reverse the usual pattern of migration.

CORRESPONDENCE

SACRED BIRDS OF THIRUKKALUKUNDARAM

I would like to share with your readers some more information on the Sacred Birds of Thirukkalukundaram and their daily visit to the saivite shrine (article by Mr KK Neelakantan in April Newsletter).

The hill is referred to as the hill of sacred vultures (Thirukkalukundram) in inscriptions dating back to 4th Century A.D. (though the actual inscription is not with us, references to this 4th Century A.D. inscriptions occur in the later 8th Century inscriptions). This shows that even in 4th Century A.D., the hill was associated with vultures. The next references to these vultures occur in the songs of saivite saint Appar (7th Century AD). He refers to the spot as 'The hill worshipped by eagles' (Kalugu Thozhu Vegagiri). This is a much more explicit reference than the earlier one. The daily visit of the birds to this temple has also been mentioned in the saivite work Thiru Vilaiyadal Puranam (Circa 6 AD). Howard, the Dutch traveller who visited this temple in 168k AD, has recorded the phenomenon of this pair of vultures accepting cooked rice from the priest. You will see that the whole phenomenon is much more intriguing than it appears. I have visited the temple thrice and have always seen the birds landing on the rock in front of the temple.

When I was in Vellore in 1971, I was told that a pair of vultures visited Mahadevamalai, a hill temple 10 miles from Vellore on Katpadi - Gudiatnam road. I visited this temple by mid-noon and was surprised to watch a pair of Scavenger vultures alight in front of the temple and accept rice from the priest. I was told that it is the same pair that visited Thirukkalukundram.

I must add that the latest information is that in both these spots, the birds have been irregular in their visits in the last few years.

(S Theodore Baskaran)

THE KASHMIR ROLLER

Reference the note of Mr JL Singh (Newsletter Vol XVII No 3), I give my observation of the Kashmir Roller as well as a few others in reply to his query 'How long do passage migrants stay in one place they are passing through'.

His observation of the bird on two dates, a month apart, almost exactly corresponds with that of mine here in Chuda, Surendranagar District. I have always seen this bird in or about the month of October. It is likely to be seen from about the end of September till the beginning of November, and certainly throughout October. This is also true for almost the whole of Saurashtra, and I have found them on telegraph wires on a railway journey.

Another such a passage migrant was the Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*). I say 'was' because I have not seen it recently, but I do hope it is passing through. The period of passage which is September-October, may be considered the same as for the Kashmir Roller.

This is not the case with all the passage migrants, such as the Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) which is a passage migrant here, but may not be for the whole of Saurashtra. At least it is not so in Bombay. Here it is only seen for a day or two, a month earlier than all other Wagtails which are winter

residents here, and coming in the last week of September or the first week of October. Only once when there was a great cyclone I saw *M. cinerea*, a female, for a week or so, the dates being 2-9-1970 to 13-9-1970. The storm occurred on the 6th and 7th followed by 20 to 22 inches of rain in 24 hours. The year before I saw the bird on 16th and 18th September only.

There are other migrants which are irregular, such as the buntings. Both the black headed and the grey necked are generally seen in spring. But they may be also seen in Autumn or even in the middle of winter. I have not seen the black-headed bunting this time as yet, although the wheat crop has been harvested which is their usual time.

(DK Vaidya)

GOLDFINCH IN THE PLAINS

Perhaps I may be forgiven for having been so dilatory in not commenting before now on a query which was raised by Mr PT Thomas at Page 2 of Vol.XVI No.6, June 1976 of the Newsletter)

Mr Thomas appears to be experiencing difficulty over the different names which have been given to the Grey-headed Goldfinch.

The position is really quite simple. When the Grey-headed Goldfinch was first named by Vigors in 1831 he classified it as a distinct species and named it *Carduelis caniceps*, and as such it is identified in older works. Later on, taxonomists regarded the bird as merely a sub-species, or geographical race, of the Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) and so, in accordance with the international rules of nomenclature, they re-named it *Carduelis carduelis caniceps*.

This accounts for the difference, which he mentions, in the names used by Whistler in 'The Popular Handbook of Indian Birds' (Page 223) and by Ali and Ripley in the 'Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan' (Vol.10, page 135).

I believe Mr Thomas would find it helpful to study the information relating to the Goldfinch given on page 611 of 'A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan' by S Dillon Ripley. He will note that there are three subspecies of the Goldfinch to be found in India and he will see quite clearly how the Grey-headed Goldfinch has been relegated from specific to sub-specific status.

The reason why the Goldfinch in the British Handbook is identified as "*Carduelis carduelis britannica*" is because reference is being made to "The British Goldfinch", that is to a particular sub-species, namely the one found in the British Isles. In the Field Guides mentioned, reference is being made to the Goldfinch as a species, and not to any particular sub-species, and they are therefore quite correct in identifying it as "*Carduelis carduelis*".

(SK Reeves)

ON MEETING A NEW BIRD

In the February issue of the Newsletter (Page 8) Mr Thomas Gay permits us to share vicariously in his joy at seeing a new bird.

It seems to me, however, that he is too ready to cry 'Mea Culpa'.

From my reading of the literature, it would appear that the White-bellied Minivet is an uncommon bird in the southern portion of what was the old Bombay Presidency.

Barnes in 'Handbook to the Birds of the Bombay Presidency', 1897, (Page 153) says that it "is spread throughout the region, but is everywhere rare".

Capt Butler in "A Tentative Catalogue of the Birds of the Deccan and South Mahratta Country" ('Stray Feathers', Vol.9, Page 394, Sept. 1881) declares the bird to be rare, and is only able to cite three specimens procured in that area.

A further point to be made is that, apparently, the bird is nowhere abundant, and where it is found, it is patchy and local in its distribution.

Another factor to account for the local paucity of the species could be that the environs of Poona do not provide it with its preferred habitat. On this point, however, I am not qualified to express an opinion.

(SK Reeves)

WHAT IS THIS BIRD?

In Vol.XVII, No.4, Page 11, April 1977 of the Newsletter, Mr Thomas Gay invites us to try and identify a bird which he saw and of which he asks whether it could have been a female Water-cock (*Gallicrex cinerea*).

I believe the bird which Mr Gay saw was a Brown Crake (*Amaurornis akool akool*) probably a female or a first summer bird, in which the ashy grey of the sides of the face and neck, the breast and abdomen, as also the white of the chin and throat, were either subdued, or which, owing to the conditions of sighting, were not observed.

A very thorough search through the extensive literature at my disposal seems to point, on balance, to the Brown Crake.

A number of the writers seem to remark on the very close likeness in shape, size and movements of this bird to the Moorhen, and also to it frequently being found in the grass, reeds and bushes at the sides of streams and watercourses, namely the habitat in which Mr Gay encountered it.

My suggestion that the bird may have been a first summer bird, that is a juvenile, is purely speculative, as nowhere in the literature can I find a full description of the bird at that stage of its development. Adults and

chicks are described, but not juveniles - not even in the 'Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan'.

If it is accessible to him, I think Mr Gay would find the chapter on this bird, and the accompanying plate, in Hume and Marshall's 'The Game Birds of India, Burmah and Ceylon' (Volume 2, page 225 et seq) most helpful.

A word of explanation, however, is necessary. The bird depicted with a black face is a young bird with some of the black nestling down still adhering to it. This is characteristic which is to be found in some, but not all, of the young birds of this species.

(SK Reeves)

In reply to Mr Thomas Gay's query in the April Newsletter 'What is this bird?', I am inclined to feel that the bird he has described is the Brown Crake (*Amaurornis akool akool*).

This is not an uncommon bird around Poona, and during the half-dozen or so encounters with it, I have observed it invariably near reed covered ponds and lakes, and occasionally near small streams with plenty of cover by the side. The birds are apparently resident, since they have been observed in nearly all the seasons. There is one small pond near Urli Kanchan (about 25 km each of Poona) where a brown crake seems to have taken up its permanent residence.

I would like to add though shy and skulking, these birds are not entirely nocturnal. I have seen a pair feeding in tall grass at 11 a.m., and on another occasion one was walking unconcernedly at about 1 p.m. in bright sunlight.

(L. Khanna)

Mr Gay's Bird (Newsletter, April 1977) is probably a Brown Crake (*Amaurornis akool*), and almost certainly a Crake of some sub-species if not the Brown. I used to see one very like the one he has described some 10 miles outside Indore, its favourite haunt being the swampy reed beds by the side of a water course. A very shy and circumspect bird, it would run into cover at the slightest suspicion of sounds or movements.

(PT Thomas)

WHO WAS CUNNINGHAM?

In his article entitled "A Temporary Migrant in India" (Newsletter Vol. XVII No3, Page 2, March, 1977) Mr Aamir Ali wonders who Cunningham was.

Readers may be interested in the merest footnote, which is all that I can provide, on the identity of the person in question.

He was Lt. Col. DD Cunningham C.I.E., F.R.C., who resided for nearly thirty years in India; for the greater part in Calcutta and the immediate neighbourhood.

He wrote a book entitled, "Some Indian Friends and Acquaintances: A Study of the Ways of Birds and other Animals frequenting Indian Streets and Gardens." It was published in 1903.

That is all that I know of him. He writes with knowledge and certainly most readably. As a F.R.S. he must obviously have been a man of some attainment.

It is from this book that T. Bainbridge Fletcher and C.M. Inglis were quoting in their book, "The Birds of an Indian Garden".

It is almost certain that Col. Cunningham would have been a member of the Bombay Natural History Society and that an Obituary Notice of his death would have been published in that Society's Journal. In which case, perhaps our fellow member Mr JS Serrao, who is the librarian of the Society, could be persuaded to give us some more information about Col. Cunningham.

(SK Reeves)

NON-OCCURRENCE OF RED TURTLE DOVE AT BHUJ (KUTCH) AND ENVIRONS

As per my diary of birdwatching, Red Turtle Dove was common at Bhuj (Kutch) and environs during October 1975 to September 1976. Thereafter I have not yet seen the bird. It is not understood what is the mystery behind their disappearance since October 1976. Will any birdwatcher throw light on this?

(SN Varu)

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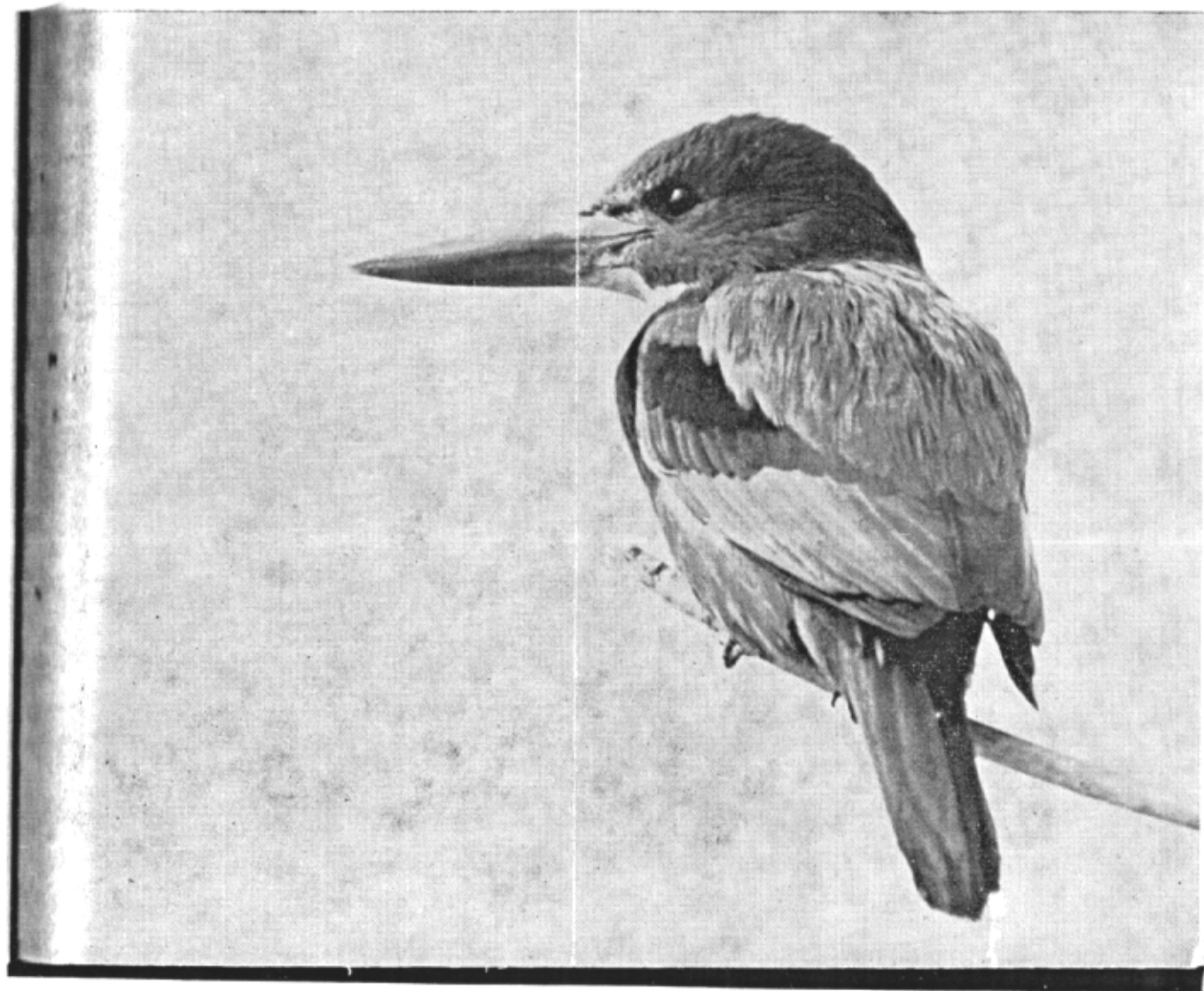
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Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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A WEEKEND IN THAILAND

Aamir Ali

Early in May, I was in Bangkok and due to leave on Saturday night. On the Friday evening, my friend Zoyeb invited me to dinner; he also invited Dr Boonsong Lekagul, Thailand's Salim Ali, and three other keen birdwatchers: an American couple and a Thai. The result was that I joined the weekend outing of the Bangkok Bird Club to the Khao Yai National Park, leaving my poor friend Zoyeb to spend his weekend changing my bookings and fighting a recalcitrant Swissair.

For me it was a delightful weekend - exciting birdwatching in a beautiful area of thick tropical jungle, with friendly and congenial companions. The Bangkok Bird Club is less than two years old but has over 100 members. Usually 15-20 of them go on their monthly weekend trips; this time there were 10 of us in all. There was 'Sam', the leader, from Mahidol University; two Thais; a German family of four - the teenage boy was the most assiduous 'lister' of the lot; and a young Dutch couple recently arrived in Bangkok. We were all armed with Dr Boonsong's excellent "Bird Guide of Thailand". Dr Boonsong is a one-man band and a remarkable personality. Not only has he produced this excellent field guide with Edward W. Cronin Jr., but has done the illustrations himself. He is the motive force behind the Conservation Society; he is about to publish a book on Butterflies. All in all, he has done more for wildlife in Thailand than anyone else. The threat to wildlife is as acute there as anywhere else. By coincidence, the April

Bulletin of the IUCN had a front page article: Stop-at-nothing Violence in Thailand's National Parks. Poaching is big - and profitable - business.

One of our Thai companions had brought along his telescope with a 25 magnification, and tripod. Excellent as telescopes are for water birds, I wondered how useful this would be in the forest, and visualised confusion and waste of time. I had to eat my uncharitable thoughts, because it proved a great boon. Our friend was most efficient in setting it up, and most patient in letting each of us have a turn, after which we left him to fold up his equipment and hump it to the next sighting. It was amazing how often the bird waited equally patiently and uncomplainingly till we had all had our fill.

The drive to Khao Yai is about 3 hours. We stopped often on the way among padi fields waiting for the monsoon. We saw flights of Collared Pratincoles, Glareola pratincola. It's not one of the two Pratincoles mentioned in "A Field Guide to the Birds of SE Asia" by Ben G. King and Edward C. Dickinson, but it is one of the two mentioned in Boonsong.

There were also six or seven Open Billed Storks (Anastomus oscitans) greyish white and black. One flew right over us, exhibiting his open bill. I was told that there is a large breeding area not far from Bangkok.

A most attractive bird was the Javanese Pond Heron, Ardeola speciosa, with its red-tinted neck. There was a couple which obligingly stuck their necks out (obviously not timid bureaucrats) to show off their colouring, instead of sitting hunched up pretending that they had no neck at all, as most pond herons do. Nearby there were two other pond herons, with necks that were brownish rather than red: Chinese Pond Herons, A. bacchus. (The field Guide doesn't list either).

Another colourful sight was a Watercock, Gallicrex cinerea, with its bright red 'frontal shield', down its forehead and beak. It obligingly turned its face towards the telescope and lifted its head just above the reeds.

Out of a neat round hole in the trunk of a dead tree, there emerged a copper-smith, to return a few minutes later with something in its beak. He went in and out of his hole a couple of times. A few minutes further on, near the bank of a stream, we saw another copper-smith lying on its back, still breathing, but obviously dying. Why, it was difficult to guess, though Salim Ali told me that they sometimes fight themselves to a standstill. We moved him to a quiet corner and hoped he would not last long as he was obviously in pain.

The Khao Yai Park itself is a large one, about 220,000 ha., with thick tropical jungle, about 800-1300 m. above sea level, with rivers, ponds, walking trails, campsites, and a complex of lodges and cabins which seemed to absorb busloads of visitors with a minimum of fuss. We had a large dormitory bungalow surrounded by jungle, built of wood, with the smooth, cool wooden floors typical of Thai houses, three large dormitory rooms

(dazzlingly clean sheets and counterpanes) all mod. cons. and a flush system that worked. There was a large sitting room, a dining room, a kitchen and a boy in attendance. If we had been the 15-20 persons we expected to be, it would have cost 10 baht per head (US\$ 0.50); as we were only 10, it cost rather more.

We saw many birds familiar to us in India; in fact I only saw three which, I believe, we do not have in our country. We saw Red Whiskered Bulbuls, Tailor birds, Crow pheasants - greater and lesser; Magpie Robins (this bird is the emblem of the Bangkok Bird Club); Flowerpeckers; Scarlet Minivets (on one occasion sitting on a topmost twig outlined against a deep blue sky); a Willow Warbler that had presumably got left behind in the migration; Oriental White eyes; Bay headed Bee eaters; (four in a row on a twig); and Mountain Imperial Pigeons.

On an exposed twig at the tippy top of a tree, a Dollarbird, Eurystomus orientalis, sat proudly while we admired it through the 'scope'. A dark bird, its bill was bright orange (though the good book says it's red and Dr. Boonsong describes it as being 'like a blackbird carrying a red chili'. It flew off to exhibit its silver dollar patch, and then came back again to its tree top perch.

We stopped near an open field to watch a Hill Myna disappear in a tree hole; at the other end of the field was a large flock of White Vented Needle-tails, Hirundapus cochinchinensis, exhibiting their powerful jet propelled flying powers. The Brown Needletail, M. giganteus, is 'possibly the fastest bird in flight' (Boonsong). Needletails are not listed in the Handbook; does this mean that they are not found in India?

It was while driving along through thick jungle that a Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Nyctyornis aethertoni, was spotted flying across the road, located, and admired through the telescope. It was not that he was such a patient character, but rather that he had captured an enormous dragon fly and didn't quite know how to handle the situation. Rather like catching a tiger by the tail, if you've ever had that experience. You could almost see his bee-eating brain behind his blue forehead working overtime at the problem. If he opened his beak to change his grip or start masticulating his victim, it would fly off. If he tried to swallow it whole, his mouth would hardly be able to accommodate such a large dish. He had certainly bitten off more than he could chew; besides his mother had often told him that it was rude to stuff his mouth too full. If he kept hesitating, hoping that time would solve the problem, God knows what the strange bird-watchers lining up behind the telescope might do. He played for time, and flew off. Those birdwatchers located him again and renewed their siege. In desperation, he took one massive gulp, and hey presto, the dragon fly had disappeared. With a waggle of his blue beard to his admiring audience, he flew off, no doubt to recount his adventures to his many wives.

An afternoon's walk along the 'Royal Orchid Trail', through steamy jungle by a turgid river failed to reveal any Forktails, though Sam and my young German friend assured me that they were often seen there.

In the evening, an Indian Pied Hornbill partly flew, partly glided majestically across a clearing, exhibiting his beautiful black and white pattern; as he alighted, he opened his wing and tail to give one final demonstration of his colouring. There was a 'roostery' of hornbills a few kilometres down the road where our German friends had once counted up to 50 birds arriving in the evening.

We might have gone and tried a recount, but finally chose to go to the wild life watchtower instead, overlooking a salt lick and a waterhole.

There was great excitement among the visitors and we were told that a tiger had been seen a short while ago. I thought that tigers had been eliminated from Thailand years ago and doubted this report. However, a group of Thais came down the path, and a round man with a round face in a very red shirt raised his hands and shouted to us: 'I was the first to see the tiger. I am very lucky. It is rare to see a tiger, and I was the first.' And he flung both his hands in the air to emphasise his point. It was impossible to harbour further doubts. A few minutes later, we saw pug marks in the mud, on the path. The UN List of National Parks lists tiger among the animals found in Khan Yai. Also elephant, sun bear, sambar, barking deer, wild boar, gaur, langur, gibbon and 'many colourful birds, including three species of hornbills, woodpeckers and the emerald dove'.

We saw neither tiger nor any other animal; the only thing I saw was a Cinnamon headed Pigeon, *Treron pulvicollis*, flying across the waterhole. The next morning, we frequently heard gibbons howling and finally saw a family of three, out-Tarzanning Tarzan.

There were a great many Black crested Bulbuls, *Pycnonotus melanicterus*. They were a cheerful sight, with a bright yellow breast, black head and a jaunty crest like a hussar of the Czar's bodyguard, and a splash of red on the throat to enliven the effect.

There were also several Black headed Bulbuls, *P. atriceps*. Much less jaunty, without a crest, and altogether a poor cousin to the Black crested one. This is a bird not found in India.

The other bird not found in India was the Green-eared Barbet, *Megalaima faiostricla*, which has a distinct green patch on either side where its ear should be.

Another bird distinguished by green was the Greater Green-billed Malkoha, *Phaenicophaeus tristis*, which has a very green bill, a very long tail with five white notches (the Rufous-bellied has only four as does the Large Green-billed illustrated in the Handbook 3, 256), and bright red eye patches. Malkohas are reputedly difficult to see as they favour 'thick vegetation of middle levels of forests'; we were lucky, then, to get good looks at several. I believe that we do not have this Malkoha in India.

Even when lunching in the restaurant, we were lucky for a Fairy Bluebird, Irena puella, perched on a bare tree nearby and enhanced the value of the lunch. The indefatigable 'scope man hopped out of the window and the instrument was focussed on the vivid blue exhibitionist before he could suspect a thing.

I am most grateful to the Bangkok Bird Club and to my companies for this delightful weekend. I am sure that any other birdwatcher visiting Bangkok will get as warm and friendly a welcome. I have asked our editor to send copies of the Newsletter to them as this seemed a way of maintaining contact.

Perhaps some day they will visit India and enjoy our birds as well.

BIRDING IN SIKKIM

Shama Futehally

At the end of April this year, my sister Zai and I spent a week going around Sikkim by bus. Our style of travelling was somewhat ragged, and our small back-packs could not accommodate the bulky Birds of Sikkim. This will account for the sparseness of my list, because there was no dearth of flying objects over our ignorant heads.

The road from Siliguri to Gangtok follows the Teesta river for a fair distance. It is a most picturesque route, with the green and white river roaring on one side and tropically vegetated slopes on the other. We saw a Common kingfisher on one of the rocks in the river and a Chestnut-headed Bee-eater on a wire overhead. Half an hour from Siliguri a Grackle flew into the forest, and Pied Bush-chats by the side of the road were not uncommon.

In Gangtok our ornithological feats began when we went into a shop to buy an umbrella. In the middle of the shop a Swallow had built a nest on a bracket attached to the ceiling. The nest had three gaping chicks and an adult bird flew in casually to feed them. We left the shopman anxiously holding three umbrellas and demanded a stool so that we could climb up and take photographs. A large part of Gangtok crowded the doorway to offer its opinion, and the camera, naturally, refused to click.

One of the prettiest sites in Gangtok is the well-preserved garden which surrounds the Government House. Here we saw a pair of Eastern Grey Wagtails, a Yellow-cheeked Bulbul, and a Himalayan Tree Pie disappearing into a tree. We were startled by the number of Verditer Flycatchers flashing around in brilliant blue-green, but we were to find them wherever we went.

Our next long stop was in Pemayentse in Western Sikkim. This is a small village at an altitude of 7,000 feet. The area is lushly covered with ever-green forest, and well supplied with leeches. On a clear day the Kanchenjunga range makes its presence felt. Verditer and Tree-pies were common here, and the Brain-fever Bird nearly drove us demented. The Grey-winged Blackbird strutted courteously up and down the lawn of the rest-house. Every

so often a stunning glimpse of chestnut and blue devolved into a Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush. One morning we saw a Rufous Turtle Dove on a branch nearby; its call (kutoor, kutoor) was so hoarse gloomy that my sister diagnosed that it was a very old dove suffering from flu. One evening a pair of Red-winged Shrike-babblers flew into a nearby bush, quarrelling amicably. We also glimpsed a couple of Red-headed Tits on a somewhat higher tree. Hoopoes, Coucals and Indian Cuckoos were around. On more than one occasion an uninteresting black shape presented its back to the sun and turned triumphantly into a Fairy Bluebird. One morning we had a long and satisfying look at a Red-headed Laughing Thrush, a riot of colours in itself. I believe that the colours can vary locally; this one was rust-red on top of the head, grey on the back, with golden patches on the wings, a greenish tail, and a black 'face'. Several birds in one, so to speak. We often heard Whistling Thrushes and were anxious to see one, but never managed. It made up for a great deal, however, to find a White-tailed Nuthatch creeping endlessly down a tree-trunk.

Walking to the next village one afternoon, we saw the Dark Grey Bush-Chat, and also a group of Scarlet (or Short-billed?) Minivets. A pair of Green-backed Tits made up the total for Pamayengtse.

On another day we drove to Yuxsom, which is about 25 km away and serves as a starting point for the training course of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute. It is also the place where, four hundred years ago, the first Chogyal of Sikkim was coronated. The route follows the Ranthong river, and incorporates one or two magnificent waterfalls. In a rock-pool underneath one was the familiar White-capped Redstart. It is always a shock to see how smart and dapper - in a word, how well-turned-out it is. A Spotted Forktail shared the pool.

We then went on to Darjeeling, and on the way we saw the good old Magpie Robin for the first time on the trip, also droves of Spotted Doves. In Darjeeling we had the good luck to hear, although we couldn't see, the Red-billed Leothrix. This was in the back garden of Mr A.D. Avari, who used to look after the Darjeeling Museum of Natural History.

Other friends then took us to Manjitar in the valley, where some fairly good teak forest remains. Here Pintail Green Pigeons were abundant, and so were Coppersmiths and Whitecheeked Bulbuls. We also saw two or three Black-capped Yellow Bulbuls. A pair of glistening black birds with red bills on the top-most branch of a tall tree, puzzled us for a long time. A friend suggested that from its shape and flight the bird was probably a Roller. We treated this suggestion with the contempt it deserved, till he produced a book and proved that it was a Dark Roller.

The next morning we went down to the Rangeet river to fish. A solitary Pied Wagtail bobbed among the rocks, but it was eclipsed by a splendid pair of Spur-winged Lapwings. While we hobbled among the rocks hoping to find a nest, they wheeled and cried endlessly over the river. And it must have been they who got all the fish.

CORRESPONDENCE:

SACRED BIRDS OF THIRUKKALUKUNDRAM

B. Vijayaraghavan

R.E. Hawkins' surmise (Newsletter, May 1977) that the Chingleput District Gazetteer might contain information on the sacred birds of Thirukkalukundram prompted me to make a search. The Gazetteer written by Charles Stewart Crole of the Madras Civil Service and published in 1879 under the title: "The Chingleput, Late Madras, District - a Manual compiled under the orders of the Madras Government" makes a reference (p.106-107) to "Tirukaleikunram or the hill of the sacred kites". It says: "Every day, two birds of the kite species come to the mountain, and are fed by an attendant Brahmin. The same two are believed to have come from Benares to receive this daily dole from time immemorial". Thus, even a century back, the phenomenon was recorded as occurring from "time immemorial".

K.K. Neelakantan (Newsletter, April 1977) who started the present correspondence, raises a doubt whether the birds have now stopped coming. My enquiries show that they continue to come - sometimes one, sometimes both. There are days when neither turns up. This is so especially on rainy days. These breaks in the appearance of one or both have been there in the earlier years also as I remember to have heard during my visit to the hillock way back in 1955 when I saw the birds being fed and also had a photograph taken. The local belief is that when a sin-stained human being approaches the portals of the temple, the birds refuse to show up. I think it was Douglas Dewar who referred to this and added: "this taken in connection with the fact that thousands of men have seen these sacred birds says much for the moral condition of the Madras Presidency".

Neelakantan in his "Birds of Kerala" (Malayalam - 1958) had observed that this bird used to be worshipped in ancient Egypt and had pointed out the bird's other name 'Pharoah's Chicken'. Will any of your readers be able to furnish more information on this and clarify the exact origin of this name?

The only plausible - though, by no means, satisfactory - theory advanced so far about the Thirukkalukundram mystery is that the birds have been trained to behave in this manner. How did the Neophron, an ugly scavenger, come to be chosen as a bird to be trained for temple purposes? Can it be that the Neophron is capable of being trained in a manner other large birds are not? Perhaps, the Neophron does possess more "intelligence" than most other birds. This is one of the very few tool-using birds known to science - a distinction it shares with the Galapagos Woodpecker finch and the Satin bower bird of Australia. Jane Van Lawick - Goodall had observed this bird in Africa picking up stones in its beak and using them to break Ostrich eggs (National Geographic, May 1968).

Some smart detective work in the vicinity of Thirukkalukundram may help unravel the mystery. But then, the religious devotee might well mourn with EHA: "the scientific spirit which we of this century worship with its relentless demand for whole burnt offerings of sentiment and oblations of proof is a spirit of a dry wind, withering the garden of the soul".

INDIAN PITTA IN CAPTIVITY

Shrikant Ingalthalikar

A very remarkable instance of Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura* b.) being kept in captivity was witnessed by a family in Poona. The bird showed great affection towards the members of the family and had a high potential of tameness and domestication. The bird also showed great variations and adaptation in its feeding habits.

The bird was captured by a young man at Deccan Gymkhana in Poona. The place is a residential area with lot of trees and bushes around. In the morning of an overcast day in the second week of June, some 7 or 8 birds were seen feeding under the bushes of a building compound. The birds were probably on their up-migration with the advancement of the South-West monsoon. One bird busy feeding was captured by stalking.

The bird was brought home by the young man. The place lies in a thickly populated old residential area with no trees and open places. The bird was kept in a small cage. The attractive little bird due to its multi-coloured plumage was presumably known as "Khandya" (Kingfisher in Marathi) by the family.

On the first two days the bird accepted soaked gram (Chana) ripe banana, and guava. On the third day the bird was very excited when a cocroach approached the vicinity of its cage. The bird was released from the cage and it immediately seized the insect. Though the bird was fit to fly, it did not show any indication of fleeing away. Hence it was released from the cage and was allowed to roam about freely in the house. It started feeding on the insects which affected the house. The bird expressed its regards towards the family by feeding largely on the bed-bugs and thus relieving the family of the painful bites and sleepless nights. It used to hunt for the insects in crevices in the clay walls, wooden columns and the damp floor of the house.

Though it had ample insect food the bird used to take cooked food and fruit also. It used to drink some water from a dish kept in its cage. The bird did not leave the house on a single occasion. In the afternoon it took rest on the top of a tall cupboard. When the ladies of the house were busy in cleaning the food-grain, the bird would help them by picking insects from the grain which was spread on the floor. The bird continued hunting for insects till late evenings before returning to roost in the cage, entering the cage by itself.

The bird had become very fond of sitting in the open palms of the family members while they were taking their meals. It used to take some boiled rice. It used to fly away when anyone other than the family members approached it.

When called-up by whistling, the bird would respond by calling "Whee-tiu". Occasionally the bird used to sing. While calling it would cock its tail. When called-up by its name "Khandya" it would come close to the calling man.

The bird was particularly sensitive to the calls of Koels which it would answer by calling "Whee-tiu".

The beloved "Khandya" after staying affectionately for eight months with the family, finally fell prey to a domestic cat.

A CROW PUZZLE

TV Jose

Among some species of birds the adult male feeds the adult female. Though not a regular affair and not meant for the sustenance of the bird concerned, it has a purpose to serve, and perhaps that purpose is to confirm the attachment the male has towards her. For this reason, such feeding is confined to the wooing and courtship period only.

I have observed, like so many of you I am sure, this type of feeding among House Crows. What distinguishes them from other birds is however the continuation of such feeding beyond the wooing and courtship period. My diary notes indicate that this type of feeding (I call it adult feeding) increases in intensity and number during the wooing and courtship period, but when chicks have to be fed there is a sharp fall. In a pair (?) of birds there was a gap of such adult feeding for about three months in a year, when they were feeding their chicks inside or outside the nest. Surprisingly, in its nearest cousin, the Jungle crow, I have not even once seen this kind of activity within or outside the wooing and courtship period. I am baffled, and ask the following questions:

1. Does anybody know for certain which sex in common house crows feed the other (adult) bird?
2. Is it always the case?
3. Has anybody seen this type of (adult) feeding along with chick feeding in common house crows?
4. Has anybody seen adult feeding in Jungle crows at any time?
5. Can anybody give the names of any other bird where adult feeding takes place beyond the wooing and courtship period?
6. What is the possible purpose of this activity and why do we not find it in other birds?

I hope some of the readers can help me through these columns.

FOOD OF REDRUMPED SWALLOW (HIRUNDO DAURICA LINN)

Mir Hamid Ali and TG Manmohan Singh

Redrumped or striated Swallow has a wide distribution all over India. It is diagonalised by a chestnut rump (conspicuous when banking in flight) and deeply forked Swallow tail.

Certain insects namely Gnats, Midges (Order Diptera); flying beetles (Order Coleoptera) and bugs (Order hemiptera) are reported to form the food of this bird by Salim Ali and Ripley (1972).

With a view to studying the food habits of this bird in Rajendranagar Area (Hyderabad-Andhra Pradesh) 8 Redrumped Swallows were shot/trapped over a period of days, in February, March 1976, when they were hovering over the Safflower crop at Agricultural Research Station, Andhra Pradesh Agricultural University, Rajendranagar. The gut contents of these birds when examined showed the presence of the following insects: aphids-Plant lice, Jassids-Plant hoppers (Order Homoptera); flies (Order Diptera), Wings of beetle (Order Coleoptera). Besides, the guts contained a mass of insect selerites, legs and mandibles.

MARAUDING HABIT IN CROWS

N Shivanarayana

Marauding habit in birds is generally observed in birds of prey. However, crows also are reported to maraud nests of other birds for feeding on eggs or young ones. Salim Ali (Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan Vol.5) recorded that crows raided nests of Bayas in colonies. I had the opportunity of witnessing the marauding habit in Jungle Crow at Maruteru (W. Godavari Dist.) where they raided the nests of Roseringed Parakeets. The crows, usually in small groups of 2-3, raided the nests of parakeets which are hollows in the trunks of Rain (Enterolobium saman) and Palm trees. The crows were observed to maraud the nests in the Rain trees but not those in Palm trees. The crows made several attempts to enter the nests, but they were successfully driven away by the parakeets. Although the crows preying upon the eggs or nestlings of Roseringed Parakeet was not observed by me, the fact that certain nests, in which eggs or nestlings were recorded on previous dates, were empty when examined at later dates, indicated the possibility of the nests' contents being preyed upon by the crows.

WHY THE BULBUL PROTESTED

AP Gupte

The observations of Mr Thomas Gay (A bulbul's protest, February 1977) are similar to those of mine (Feeding habits of the Butcher Bird, July 1969); the only difference being that in the former case a Bulbul objected to a shrike feasting upon its prey while in the latter case it was a Large Cuckoo Shrike.

I feel that the alarm call of the Bulbul (and the Large Cuckoo Shrike) was due to sheer fright and not because of its mistaking the prey for its chick.

With its marvellously keen eyesight it is not very likely that a bird would mistake a dead animal for its own chick. No doubt all the small birds are familiar with the hunting habits of the shrikes but most of the time the latter feed upon insects. A shrike feeding upon a mouse or a frog is a rare sight which is enough to frighten a small bird.

I have seen a Bay-backed shrike giving the alarm call to protest against the presence of a Grey Shrike in its territory.

WHAT IS THIS BIRD?

Thomas Gay

Best thanks to all those fellow readers who so kindly offered suggestions in solution of my problem.

After consulting Vol II of the monumental work of Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley, as well as the relevant volume of Birds in the Fauna of British India series, I think my bird must have been a Brown Crake (*Amaurornis akool akool*) as suggested by two of my correspondents. Although it seemed to me of a uniform dark brown (chocolate) colour, there must have been dark ashy-grey patches which I overlooked. This bird has already been recorded from the Poona area, although I myself have never seen it.

The bird showed itself at about 4.30 p.m., running out from some coarse grass into an open patch which was decorated by a large cake of cow-dung. I stood, some ten paces away, with the rocklike immobility that bird-watchers have to acquire, and the bird showed no fear. It began to plunge its bill vigorously into the cow-dung, from which it appeared to extract something edible. Just then, some village girls came along, carrying clothes for washing in a nearby pool, and the bird scuttled into a narrow drain overhung by bushes. I saw no more of it.

Incidentally, does anyone who has seen a Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) know whether the female possesses the horny shield which the male sports at the base of his bill? This is a point on which none of the authorities are helpful. If Smt. Watercock does have this shield, my original guess is completely ruled out, since my bird showed no such conspicuous appendage.

OCCURRENCE OF CHESTNUTHEADED BEE-EATER IN NASIK

GK Vaishampayan

Armed with The Book of Indian Birds (10th edition) I did a pilgrimage of Trimbakeshwar, Nasik District, with my family. While at Nasik my son drew my attention to a bird which was constantly entering and coming out of a hole in an earthbank. On a closer look the bird was found to be a Bee-eater, catching butterflies, battering them on a branch of a tree and taking them to the nest hole. A comparison of the bird with the illustrations in Salim Ali, showed beyond doubt that it was the Chestnutheaded Bee-eater, Merops leschenaulti.

On returning to Bombay, I showed the list of birds made during the pilgrimage to Mr JS Serrao. He tells me that the Chestnut-headed Bee-eater is a resident in the West from Belgaum in Karnataka southwards. However, to keep up my interest possibly, he suggests that I write and tell about this record and get a comment thereon either from you or members of the Bird-watchers Club of India.

I know the Little Green Bee-eater well, and there is no chance of my confusing the bird I have seen at the nest hole with it. The date of the incident is 9th to 16th May.

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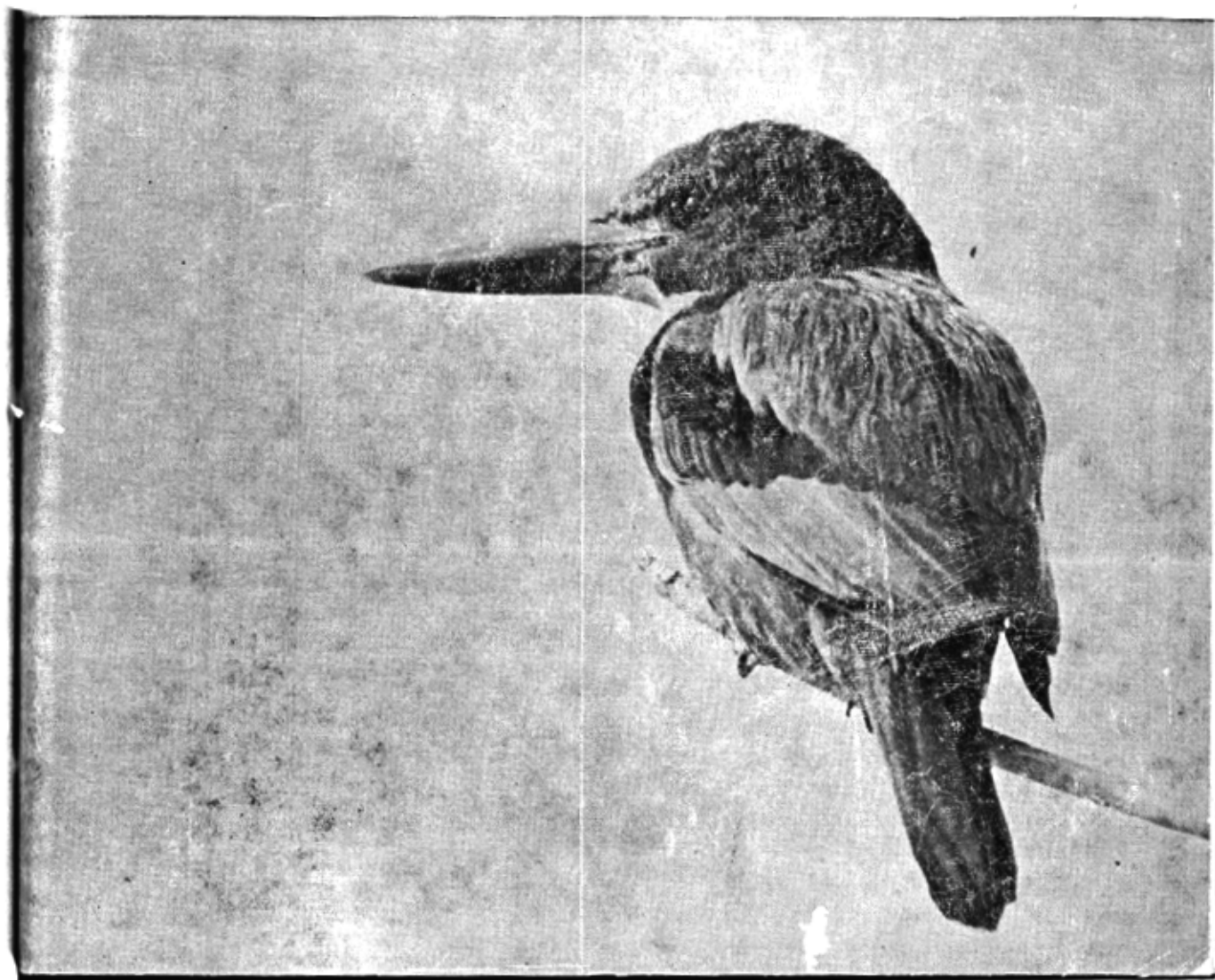
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BLACK KITES IN GENEVA

Aamir Ali

A couple of years ago, when I was birdwatching in Geneva with my 'guru' Oliver Ashford in early spring, he rubbed his hands and said, Aha, soon the Black Kites will be here. I couldn't understand why anyone should get excited about Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*); the cheel or Pariah Kite (*Milvus migrans govinda*) is such a common sight in India, and as its usually seen scavenging, I placed it low in the avian caste system.

This year we had a pair of Black Kites raising a family of two near our house. Having followed their fortunes closely for almost four months, my attitude to Kites has changed, and I feel a very special kinship with them.

Black Kites are summer visitors in Geneva and a common sight. You can see them soaring over a field or forested area outside the town, or over the lake, swooping down to pick up a fish, dead or alive ("Sometimes fishes like an Osprey", says the Hamlyn Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe). Maarten Bijleveld writes in his Birds of Prey in Europe: "The Black Kite is the only European raptor to increase in some regions in recent times. This is unquestionably related to the increasing water pollution and the resulting fish mortality in such areas, since in other places the species shows a distinct decrease."

The commonest Kite in most parts of Europe is the (Red) Kite (*Milvus milvus*). The Black Kite frequent inland waters, so in Geneva it is commoner than the 'Red' one. To quote Bijleveld again: "The Black Kite breeds everywhere in Switzerland except in the Alps, the highest concentration being found in the western part of the Mittelland, particularly round the lakes of Biel, Neuchatel and Geneva, where the Kite is virtually absent. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, there has been a marked increase due to eutrophication (greater numbers of whitebait) and the pollution of lakes and rivers..."

"In 1969, the number of breeding pairs in Switzerland was at least 1,250, making it by far the largest population in central Europe. Of this population, about 385 pairs breed in the region of Lake Geneva and the Rhone plain....".

If there are still 385 pairs around Geneva, we claim one of them as our own.

This year, I saw a Black Kite for the first time on 17 March; on 26 March I saw one circling near our house. After that it was seen frequently in the neighbourhood, perching on the same tree, often on the same branch. Bordering our garden, about 35 metres from the house, there is a row of large old trees. Beyond that is an estate belonging to a patrician Genevese family who occupy it only in summer. This provides a nice open space where Kites can circle and make their approach run to the trees.

On 4 April, there were two of them. After that, the two were usually seen together, often perching on the same branch. On 7 April, they were perched together, and one of them was busy eating something held in its claws. As the other one flew off, it was immediately attacked by crows.

This became a regular feature of Kite life. Usually, there were three crows doing the attacking. They would wait on a nearby tree, and as soon as one of the Kites appeared, they would attack, swooping, dive-bombing, harrassing it in every way. Once a crow followed the Kite to its perching place and sat itself down a couple of feet away. After a few minutes, it flew off with one more 'buzzing' attack. The Kites were slower and more cumbersome; even to move from one branch to another on the same tree, they had to take a wide circle, laying themselves open to sportive attacks. On one occasion, one of the crows swooping on a Kite, actually hit it. Later, these attacks seemed to lessen, but never ceased completely.

On 8 April, on two occasions a Kite had a large twig in its beak. Presumably, the couple were building their nest on the tree on which they usually perched, and sure enough there were a few twigs already arranged in a fork about 30 m. above the ground. Both Kites shared in the work, but the crows didn't leave them in peace for a moment. Was this just good fun or were they trying to prevent the Kites from building in their area?

On 24 April, on four separate occasions, I saw a Kite with a twig in its beak. Once it landed in our garden to pick up a small branch and looked majestically around before flying off again. They were not building in their usual tree any more; the few twigs that had already been placed there remained, but nothing more. Where had they transferred their construction site? I told my son that I would give him twenty francs if he found it. Driven, I fear, by greed rather than love of nature, he discovered it within ten minutes, on another tree only about 30 m. from the first one.

It was in a fork about 50 m. from the ground. It was comparatively tidy and seemed to be entirely of twigs. Once, when the chicks were 9 days old, there suddenly appeared a bunch of long grassy fronds hanging untidily from the nest. Was this algae from the lake or weeds from a garden? How and why had they got there? Did they get carried there deliberately (as decoration?) or accidentally with a fish that the parents brought? Anyway, they hung there for 3-4 days before drying up and disappearing.

Kites often build nests sociably; I didn't see any other nests nearby.

From 24 April till about mid-July, much of our attention was focussed on that nest and the family fortunes of the Kites became a part of our life. As it was about 50 m. high, it was not possible to look into the nest; it was, however, possible to see if a Kite was sitting on it. Later, we saw first the heads and then the bodies of the young ones.

During March and April it had been easier to see what was happening as the trees were bare; by the time the nest was completed, the leaves were out and visibility reduced. There was a lucky gap in the leaves which enabled us to see the nest quite clearly from the terrace.

On 28 May, both Kites were seen at the nest; on the next day, one of them, presumably the female, was sitting on the nest. I took it that she was incubating and that the eggs had been laid. After that, at most times one of the Kites was sitting on the nest. I assumed that this was the female, but I see from the Handbook I:226 that both sexes participate in nest building, incubation and nest feeding. So perhaps it was sometimes one, sometimes the other. I refer to them as male and female, father and mother, based on my old fashioned ideas of their respective roles; I assume that I was often wrong.

Until 11 June, nothing much happened. On that day, there seemed to be a lot more movement. At 8.30 p.m. the male arrived with much shrilling and fussing. The female was standing in the nest, and it looked as if she was picking

something up from the bottom of the nest and feeding it to the as yet invisible chicks. It made six or seven moves of this sort. I therefore presumed that the eggs had hatched on 10 June, after an incubation period of 13-14 days.

The only reference to the incubation period I can find is in the Dictionary of Birds in Colour, by Bruce Campbell, which says it is about four weeks. If so, the eggs must have been laid much earlier than I thought - about mid-May rather than the 28th. Can anyone offer any advice?

The 12th of June, (second day after hatching) was a Sunday and permitted lengthier observations. While the mother was standing on the edge of the nest, there was a fluttering movement at her feet, and the top of a white fluffy head appeared several times. It wasn't till five days later that the second fluffy head was seen, and it became clear that there were two newly-borns in the nest. One of them, the one that we had seen first, was always the more active and aggressive one.

Do Kites feed by regurgitation? On 17 June (7th day) on two occasions it looked as if the mother regurgitated food, and then picked up pieces to feed the chicks. I saw similar feeding activities on the 10th day, when the father came and watched for a while without giving any particular assistance (a typical male), and on the 16th day, when the mother arrived with something in its beak, but then bent down as if regurgitating anyway. On the 22nd day both chicks seemed to be eating something though there was no adult around. One, of course, was getting a lot more food than the other.

The whole period was an exceptionally rainy one, and there were several severe storms. There was a particularly severe one when the chicks were 8 days old; there was another bad one when they were 28 days old. We had a flooded cellar, but the nest obviously had a more effective drainage system and remained unaffected.

By the 9th day, the parents were absent from the nest for long periods. The youngsters were still fluffy; as their heads appeared more distinctly over the rim of the nest, the beak looked very dark against the white fluff. On the 11th day, the active youngster was standing up. The wings were quite dark, but the head was still fluffy. By the 15th day, the wings were tawny, the breasts streaky and the fledglings were about the size of a domestic hen. On the 17th day, one chick opened his wings and looked suddenly undressed, as his body was still very white and immature looking. The heads were getting a bit darker and less fluffy. By the 21st day, the heads looked off-white and the neck was speckled. Both youngsters flapped their wings occasionally, and there was a clearly marked white band on the underside of the wings. On the 23rd day, after flapping their wings, they hung them out, pretending to be cormorants. For the next few days, the chicks were often sitting on the edge of the nest like teenagers anxious to leave home and be on their own, but still not quite able to make it. Their bodies no longer looked white and naked. On the 34th day, the active one sat on a branch outside the nest for the first time; by the evening he was back in the nest again.

Both parents were in attendance throughout the period. The mother often stood on the edge of the nest looking in; occasionally she sat in the nest with me fledgelings. Every time one of the adult Kites approached, it gave out its shrill cry. There were two varieties of call. One was the normal quavering call of the kite; the other was a more agitated, alarmed call, not unlike a puppy that has been beaten.

I had to leave Geneva on 15 July and had hoped to see the young ones fly off from the nest before then. If this were a story, the proper ending would be that on the evening of the 14th I saw them launch off circle round in faro-well and then slowly fly off into the sunset, with the parents following discreetly behind. Alas, this was not quite what happened. I left on the morning of the 15th with a last look before leaving; the youngsters were still in the nest. They were obviously waiting for me to go so they could launch out into the world unobserved and undisturbed.

My son was instructed to keep watch on the nest. He reported that after the 19th July (39th day) the nest was empty and he did not see the young ones again.

When I returned to Geneva on 8 August, the nest looked very deserted. Often we heard Kites shrilling in the neighbourhood, and a strong imagination enabled me to recognise occasional shrills which were more youthful than others. I concluded that our two youngsters were still around.

Footnote: August was wet and unseasonably cold. After 18 August, I did not see Kites in Geneva again (except for one immature one on 26 August). Had they migrated to warmer climes already?

BIRDWATCHING IN BORIVILI NATIONAL PARK

Md Ali Reza Khan

On 10th February 1977 I accompanied Dr Oscar Owre of Miami University to the Borivili National Park as he was keen to take notes on the Bulbuls. We started at 7 in the morning from the Goregaon and of the Aarey Milk Colony, and none of us had very definite ideas about the areas we were to visit or the extent of the road we have to travel.

The sun was still a few metres below the horizon. This part of the suburb is much cooler than the city obviously because of the openness of the countryside. During the first few minutes we did some brisk walking to warm ourselves, so the birds must have watched us rather than us watching them. But we did notice Ashy Wren Warblers around the grass fields flitting among them and calling continuously. We then heard the towit-towit of the Tailor Bird from the far end of the field, and they were soon joined by Common Mynas and Black Drongos, and small parties of Roseringed Parakeets flew overhead.

Because of the absence of the sun the visibility was poor and binoculars were of no use. We could see a Rufous-backed Shrike over a dead stump almost merging with the perch. A few Indian Robins hopped along the road sides collecting food and withdrew inside the shrubbery at our approach. At the entrance of the national Park, a flock of 9 noisy Blossom-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) passed overhead. By then we could see the reddish blotch as the sun was trying hard to emerge above the horizon. All this time a Pariah Kite was swooping down on refuse left on the road. Its manoeuvrability through the dense foliage and electric posts was simply remarkable.

We saw something which looked like a ball of feathers sticking to the tip of a dead leaf stalk of an Indian Palm, *Borassus flabellifer*. After focussing our binoculars we could identify it as a bird of prey still in the stage of 'disorientation'. It was so well camouflaged that Dr Owre took sometime to spot it although the bird was resting 10 metres above us. He was delighted after sighting the bird. It was possibly a female Shikra. In the meantime Dr Owre set his mini tape recorder for recording his field notes. According to him jotting down field notes kills valuable time which could be otherwise spent in the field for observing important events. Several minutes passed and the shikra looked down to see what the birdwatchers were doing. Later in the day we saw five more of them, some on flight, and others being mobbed by the Grey Drongo - a common winter visitor to this area.

The Bombay Natural History Society is arranging bird counts on the last Sunday of every month. Members and their friends are divided into several groups and are posted along the road and ultimately they cover the distance between certain culverts of the road in a fixed time. To the Bombay birdwatchers these culverts are well known, and we put the number of species seen in a fixed time between the culverts.

There was a little water near the first culvert between Goregaon and the Kanheri Caves, and so we expected some waders. A Common Sandpiper and a Pond Heron saved us from disappointment. It was a good spot for many arboreal birds as the sun was warming the surroundings. The sunbirds, especially the Purple and Purple-rumped ones were very active. Thickbilled and Tickell's Flowerpeckers were in abundance.

The National Park was greatly beautified by the orange red flowers of the palas, "flame of the forest" *Butea monosperma*, in the leaf-less crown of these small-sized trees. Among the bare lot of trees the view could have been dull without the palas. The panoramic view also included such lovely flowers as the Red-silk Cotton Tree, *Bombax malabarica* and the Coral Tree *Erythrina variegata*.

The artistic way in which the bigger birds like the Racket-tailed Drongo, Grey Drongo, Jungle Crow, House Crow, Tree Pie and Roseringed Parakeet were drinking nectar from all those basically red flowers needs special mention. Other efficient nectar-feeders included a party of Grey-headed Mynas, a small flock of Rosy Pastor or Rose-coloured Starlings, Gold-fronted Chloropsis, groups of Common Myna, Red-whiskered and Red-vented Bulbuls. The Rosy Pastors

were partial to silk cotton. Dr Salim Ali and his student have recorded fifty species of birds, and also Palm Squirrels and Bats visiting these flowers mostly for nectar.

The Lesser Whitethroats, migrant from the Himalayas and beyond, were visiting the palas trees chiefly for insects. This was the case also with Rufous-bellied Babblers.

When we were noting the different activities of birds on the red flowers Crimsonthroated Barbets (Coppersmith) and Small Green Barbets, broke the silence which prevailed in the Park by their deep, loud calls. A Barred Jungle-Owlet was calling inside the jungle, and the Racket-tailed Drongos were busy imitating all the birds which they might have heard even long ago. They can fool the birdwatchers like anything. Crow Pheasants may often be mistaken for langurs as their whooping note is similar to langurs.

A number of Palm Swifts were hawking insects above the lanky palms. Both Whitebacked and Longbilled (?) vultures were soaring in the up currents of warm air. Once a Crested Serpent Eagle flew over us and bulbuls, drongos, Tailor Birds and Ashy Wren Warblers produced their alarm notes.

It was eleven and the sun was uncomfortable, in spite of winter. We reached a bridle path which took us to the dried, flat mud-bank of Vehar lake. A few hundred metres away from us there was a flock of c. 200 Little Cormorants busy basking. Next to them were Brownheaded Gulls and possibly Gullbilled Terns.

In the foreground the mud-banks cracked because of excessive evaporation. Little Ringed Plovers and a few Kentish Plovers were running after insects in such places. We also noticed the Eastern Grey and White Wagtails, Skylarks and a large flock of Cattle Egrets. It was a fascinating group. Each Cattle Egret virtually ran a few steps in front, out-stretched neck partly raised, head and bill projected forward to catch insects or juvenile toads and frogs. On spotting or aiming a prey the bird stood for a while as if a fast moving vehicle had suddenly stopped and moved its projected bill a little to left and right, and vice versa, several times before nabbing the prey. Dr Owre said that they do this possibly to get a clear view of the prey by adjusting their binocular vision, in the way that snakes do by moving their heads back-and-forth or side ways.

A number of Little Stints, a few Red Shanks, Common Sandpipers and juveniles of Blackwinged Stilts were collecting food from the shore. One White-breasted Kingfisher was collecting insects from the grass, far away from water. On our way back to the jungle, a Redbreasted Flycatcher, a Black-naped Blue Flycatcher, a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher and a Blyth's Reed Warbler called from among the bar (Zizyphus) thickets.

The alarm notes of bulbuls drew our attention. Although I could not locate the predator I was delighted to see a female Loten's Sunbird. She was displaying before a Booted Warbler (?), on a liana, 10 m above the ground. The

bulbuls were only a metre apart. There appeared a male Loten's Sunbird which danced and chased the female before disappearing from the scene. The Warbler was also displaying. As I was unable to locate the predator it remained a mystery whether all this chasing and displaying was part of "displacement" activities, or a real fight for feeding territories.

When we finally came out of the park in the evening our record reached about 75 species - a better figure than I had scored in my earlier visits.

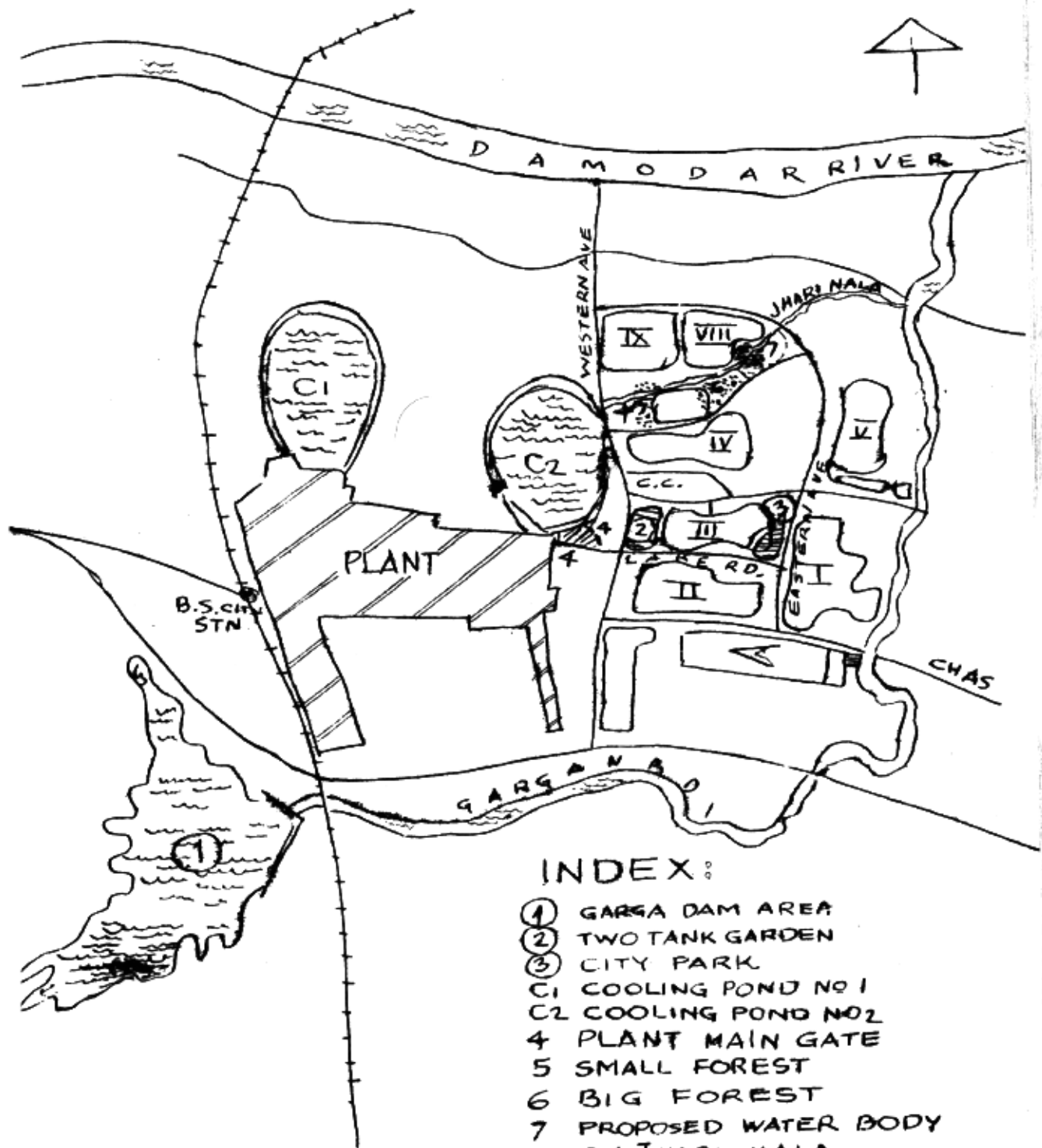
BIRD LIFE IN BOKARO STEEL CITY

Zafar Futehally

In February this year Dr Salim Ali was invited by the Management of Bokaro Steel City to make some suggestions about conservation of the bird life within the large campus of the steel mills. Duleep Matthai and I also went along. Several suggestions were made, such as mass planting of Ficus species of Trees, establishing a corps of Honorary Tree and Wildlife Wardens, landscaping the environs of the cooling ponds and maintaining the islands within these water bodies as resting places for birds, desiltation of City Park lake, and leaving rushes only along the edges instead of covering the entire area. A suggestion was also made that Mrs Jamal Ara be invited by the Management to write a brochure on the birds of Bokaro City, and to act as a Nature Guide for the residents to get themselves acquainted with birds and trees.

I was there again in August, and had an opportunity of seeing the progress that has been made with regard to these plans. In a sense it is curious that because of the rigid protection afforded within such complexes as Bokaro there is a great deal of bird life in the pockets where suitable habitat exists. Many public sector undertakings might well follow Bokaro's example, and create bird sanctuaries, safari parks, botanical gardens and recreational areas making the life of the residents pleasant and interesting. The accompanying map gives a general idea of the natural areas which will be "improved" and preserved. During my recent visit I had the good fortune of seeing the Chestnut Bittern (*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*) in the two-tank garden, after a very long time. I had seen this Bittern perhaps 3 decades ago around the Powai Lake, but do not recall seeing it at any other time. There was also a female Bronze-winged Jacana with 3 chicks. The chicks appeared to be brand new, and one of the adults was looking after them very solicitously. A Brahminy Kite circling over the tank seemed capable of pouncing on the chicks, but did not make the attempt. The migrant Common Swallows were already there on the 21st of August, and the other birds seen during the trip were the Indian Moorhen, Cormorants, Black Drongos, Common Mynas, Pied Mynas, Bank Mynas, Indian Roller, Longbilled Vultures, Blackwinged Kites, Cuckoo Shrike, Grey Tit, Tailor Bird, Koel, Cattle Egrets, Pond Herons, Pariah Kites, and Spotted Munias. I saw an enormous nest of the White-throated Munia on a Banyan tree which seemed rather unusual.

◦ BOKARO STEEL CITY



Along the banks of the Garga dam there were flocks of what I presume were Larks. I could not identify them, and wonder whether any suggestions can be put forward by our readers. They were dispersed singly in the low vegetation, and at my approach they flew for about 100 yards or so, and disappeared in the cover again. As far as I recall the flight was fairly straight though not very strong, and they never flew very high. The birds were reddish brown according to my notes, and they called as they flew up, but I do not recall the nature of the sound. In an area of about five acres there must have been about fifty birds.

CHROZOPHORA ROTTELERI, KLOTZSCH, (WEED) AS FOOD
ATTRACTANT TO THE ROSERINGED PARAKEET (PSITTACULA KRAMERI)

Mir Hamid Ali and P. Syamsunder Rao

The Roseringed Parakeet (Psittacula krameri) is a resident bird with wide distribution all over India. It is slim, grass green in colour with deeply hooked red bill and pointed tail. The male has characteristic rose ring collar, absent in female.

The food of the Roseringed parakeet includes fruit, cereals, grain and seeds of all kinds of wild as well as cultivated plants. Fruits of the wasteland weed, xanthium is also reported as a food for Roseringed Parakeet (Salim Ali and Ripley, 1969).

Huge flocks of Roseringed parakeets (nearly 100 numbers) were found feeding voraciously on the seeds of C. rotteleri, a weed plant growing in the dry, harvested sorghum and rice experimental plots at Agricultural Research Institute, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad during the month of November 1976.

Chrozophora rotteleri is an erect undershrub of 2½' height, with bushy appearance. The fruit of this plant is a capsule with trilocular ovary having three seeds, which are fleshy and albuminous in nature (Gamble, 1957). The parakeets are attracted by the seeds of this plant, which grows as a weed.

To investigate the feeding habit of the Roseringed parakeets on these weed plants, parakeets (totalling to 10) were trapped at different intervals during November, 1976 and their gut contents were analysed. The gut content analyses of all the ten parakeets revealed the presence of Chrozophora rotteleri seeds along with broken pieces of Bengal gram and Rice grains.

It is therefore presumed that the seeds of C. rotteleri, growing as a weed plant in the field, are taken as food by Roseringed parakeet, in the absence of cultivated crops.

SANDPIPERS AT A SUBURBAN MARSH

Asad Akhtar

The last sandpiper on the marsh near the Sindhi Associations Housing Colony at Chembur, Bombay 71, was observed on 3rd June '77 and the first flock of sandpipers was heard on 14th August '77 and seen on 18th August '77, numbering about 6/8.

Thus hardly 2½ months elapsed, when the sandpipers are back in the marsh, after a journey to their breeding grounds.

Till the 2nd week of May the sandpipers remain in good strength in the marsh. But from the 3rd week of May a gradual fall in their numbers is evident.

On 11th May '77 I observed 80/85 sandpipers at a single spot, but from the 3rd week onwards their numbers started falling. The last sandpiper was observed on 3rd June '77 in the evening.

The sandpipers appear to be passage migrants as there is a gradual increase in their numbers from August to late October, and then from October, the number starts falling. The sandpipers again appear in good numbers from late (or mid) April onwards till mid May, and then again there's a sharp decline in their numbers.

As far as I have observed, there seems to be no connection between the rise and fall in the number of the sandpipers, and the dryness of the marsh (i.e. the rise and fall in the water level of the marsh).

CORRESPONDENCE:

RED HEADED MERLINS NESTING IN DENSELY POPULATED AREA

RN Dharap

A pair of Red Headed Merlins (*Falco chiquera chiquera*) was found nesting in the 'mandi' area of Pune city, which is one of the most densely populated areas in this city. The nest- which is a collection of sticks - is on a platform of about 4 feet diameter at the top of the tower of the main building of mandi, at a height of approximately 100-120 feet from the ground. This pair is being watched by our group since February 1976. That time we thought them to be Laggar Falcons (*Falco biarmicus juggar*), when we watched them from a distance of about 300 feet. Also this was one of the typical habitats of Laggar Falcons. (Salim Ali's Handbook Volume I). But after closer observations made by us in February '77, we saw the bluish slaty grey back, white underparts with closely packed horizontal black-bars, and the most distinctive chestnut-red head, moustachial stripe and the broad black band near the end of the tail in the adult falcons. So the conclusion was 'Red Headed Merlin' after carefully watching the bird several times. In

March '77 we saw the parents with three immature merlins swiftly flying over the area surrounding the mandi market, looking for their prey like sparrows, small birds, insects and in the evenings, small bats.

But the usual habitat of a Red Headed Merlin is open thinly wooded deciduous country. So in that respect, this nesting site and habitat at Pune are quite strange.

I request the readers to contact me if there has been a finding of such a nesting in similar habitat anywhere else.

GREY BABBLERS PECKING AT WINDOW PANES

JL Singh

One of the wings of the Rest House I am staying in has a large glass window facing a garden. Every day one or two grey babblers (*turdoides malcolmi*) come and peck quite violently at the glass panes of this window. They have done this at all times of the day more or less daily. I have never seen a babbler or any other kind behave like this before. Our readers views may be invited.

*** ** * ** ***

With your permission, I have a suggestion to make. I am sure there must be many birdwatchers who are in the stage of birding that I have reached; namely, I can recognise and name most of the common birds but are not very sure how to proceed from there. So, I suggest that experienced birdwatchers like yourself and others write articles in the Newsletter directed particularly to birders like myself telling us how to progress in our birdings. Subjects can be things like: what type of records to keep, what to look for in birds generally and what to watch in a particular bird; the best time and place to watch, particular birds, what information about birds interests serious ornithologists, how to go about making a complete birding study of an area, how to look for nests, how to assess bird population in an area, etc. I am sure you can easily add to my list of topics.

A CROW PUZZLE

Regarding Mr TV Jose's questions in the correspondence section of the Newsletter Vol. XVII No.7 July 77 and Mr MS Ramamoorthi's answers in Vol. XVII No.8 August, 1977, I want to give some opinion of mine.

I have observed feeding of House Crow (male) to House Crow (female) near the nest during courtship period. Also I have observed that when House Crow (female) was continuously sitting in the nest for incubation of eggs, another House Crow (male) was feeding to it. This was observed by me on the nest on peepal tree opposite my house during last breeding season.

SN Varu

In the issue of August 1977, under the caption "A Crow Puzzle" MS Rama-moorthi writes that "It is the male in the Common House Crow that feeds the other (adult) birds." Every day about sunrise in the morning I feed the crows at a lone place near my house. I particularly observed that out of the ten birds which come there to pick up titbits of biscuits, one adult youngster is invariably fed by its male and female parents.

The adult youngster keeps on begging with quivering wings and open purplish mouth from both.

Sursinhji Jadeja

WHAT IS THIS BIRD?

K Shankar

During the past one year and a half of birdwatching in our school, I have often come across a certain bird which I have so far been unable to identify. Can any of the subscribers of the Newsletter help me identify it? The following are the details of the bird:

Size: Koel
Habits: Arboreal flight noticeable like that of the *Dendrocitta vagabunda*; and generally seen in pairs.

Field Characteristics: Dull black on the back and head, with breast thickly streaked or mottled with white fading to grey at the vent. A white wing tip is conspicuous during flight. Long tail, about 10" long (black with 4 or 5 bars of white). White ring around the eye, conspicuous.

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P Syamsunder Rao is A Research Assistant, Ornithology Scheme, at the AP Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad 500 030.

Asad Akhtar, A1/151, Sindhi Society, Chembur, Bombay 400 071, is a promising young protege of Dr Salim Ali - a keen birdwatcher and Nature conservationist.

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Sursinhji Jadeja, President, The Saurashtra Society of Dowzers, care of Dairy Qtr. Rajkot 360 003.

K. Shankar, New Hostel C Block, Rishi Valley School, Rishi Valley 517 352, Chittoor Dist., A.P.

P.S. Aamir Ali's article on the Black Kite reminds me of the interesting time I had in Andheri watching the nest of a Pariah Kite on a palm tree. I was surprised to find that the young birds had very sanitary habits, and they used to reverse perilously close to the edge from the centre of the nest before defecating. The nest must therefore have been perfectly hygienic. I also recall that whenever the kites came to our water tub for a drink a crow would amble along, and as the kite bent low for a drink the crow would tug at the tail of the kite causing it to turn around with great indignation.

J.L. Singh refers to Grey Babblers pecking at window panes. In our house here in Bangalore a male Pied Bushchat has been attacking the window panes of our sitting room regularly for the past many months. Obviously it cannot look upon the prospect of another male in its territory with equanimity and in fact cannot even tolerate its own shadow.

Editor

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ — ಬಡವರ ಏಳಿಗೆಗಾಗಿ ನಿರಂತರ ಯತ್ನ ನಡೆಯುತ್ತಿರುವ ರಾಜ್ಯ

**ಹರಿಜನ—ಗಿರಿಜನ ಮತ್ತು ಇತರ ಹಿಂದುಳಿದ ವರ್ಗದವರ ಏಳಿಗೆಗಾಗಿ ರಾಜ್ಯದ
ಐದನೆ ಯೋಜನೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಹದಿನಾಲ್ಕು ಕೋಟಿ ರೂಪಾಯಿ ಒದಗಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ**

**ಈ ಮೊತ್ತ, ಹರಿಜನ ಗಿರಿಜನರ ಏಳಿಗೆಗೆ ಕಳೆದ ನಾಲ್ಕು ಯೋಜನೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಖರ್ಚು
ಮಾಡಿದ ಮೊತ್ತಕ್ಕೆ ಸಮನಾಗಿದೆ.**

ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ

- * ಈಗ ಒಂದು ಲಕ್ಷ ಹರಿಜನ, ಗಿರಿಜನ, ಪ್ರಿಮೆಟ್ರಿಕ್ ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿಗಳು ವ್ಯಾಸಂಗ ವೇತನ ಪಡೆಯುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಇವರ ಜೊತೆಗೆ ಹಿಂದುಳಿದ ವರ್ಗಕ್ಕೆ ಸೇರಿದ ಒಂದೂವರೆ ಲಕ್ಷ ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿಗಳು ಈ ಸೌಲಭ್ಯವನ್ನು ಪಡೆಯಲಿದ್ದಾರೆ.
- * ಈಗ ಕೇಂದ್ರ ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ವ್ಯಾಸಂಗ ವೇತನ ಪಡೆಯುತ್ತಿರುವ ಮುನಿಷಿಪಲ್ ಸಾವಿರಕ್ಕೂ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿಗಳು ಅದರ ಜೊತೆಗೆ ವಸತಿ ಮತ್ತು ಆಹಾರ ಭತ್ಯವಾಗಿ ಪ್ರತಿ ತಿಂಗಳಿಗೆ ತಲಾ ಒಂದು ನೂರ ಇಪ್ಪತ್ತೈದು ರೂಪಾಯಿ ಪಡೆಯುವರು.
- * ಸರ್ಕಾರಿ ಹಾಗೂ ಸರ್ಕಾರಿ ಹಣ ಸಹಾಯ ಪಡೆಯುತ್ತಿರುವ 1076 ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿನಿಲಯಗಳಿದ್ದು, ಅವುಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಸುಮಾರು ಐವತ್ತು ಸಾವಿರ ಹರಿಜನ, ಗಿರಿಜನ ಮತ್ತಿತರ ಹಿಂದುಳಿದ ವರ್ಗದ ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿಗಳಿದ್ದಾರೆ.

ಆರ್ಥಿಕ ನೆರವು

- * ಹರಿಜನ, ಗಿರಿಜನ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ನಿಗಮ ಈವರೆಗೆ ವಿವಿಧ ಉದ್ಯಮಗಳನ್ನು ಆರಂಭಿಸುವವರೆಗೆ ಸುಮಾರು ಹತ್ತೊಂಭತ್ತು ಲಕ್ಷ ರೂಪಾಯಿ ಹಣ ಸಹಾಯ ಮಾಡಿದೆ.
- * ಇತರ ಹಿಂದುಳಿದ ವರ್ಗಗಳವರು ಮತ್ತು ಅಲ್ಪ ಸಂಖ್ಯಾತರ ಏಳಿಗೆಗೆ ನೆರವು ನೀಡಲು ಪ್ರತ್ಯೇಕ ನಿಗಮ ಒಂದನ್ನು ಆರಂಭಿಸಲಾಗುತ್ತದೆ.
- * ಹರಿಜನ, ಗಿರಿಜನ ಗೃಹವಸತಿ, ನಿಗಮ ಈವರೆಗೆ ಇಪ್ಪತ್ತಮೂರು ಸಾವಿರ ಕುಟುಂಬಗಳಿಗೆ ಸ್ವಂತ ಮನೆ ಕಟ್ಟಿಕೊಳ್ಳಲು ಸಹಾಯ ಮಾಡಿದೆ.
- * ಹರಿಜನ, ಗಿರಿಜನರಿಗೆ 2.26 ಲಕ್ಷ ಮನೆ ನಿರ್ಮಾಣಗಳನ್ನೂ, ಜನತಾ ಯೋಜನೆಯಂತೆ ನಲವತ್ತೈರಡು ಸಾವಿರ ಮನೆಗಳನ್ನೂ ಹಂಚಲಾಗಿದೆ.
- * ರಿಯಾಯಿತಿ ಬಡ್ಡಿದರದಲ್ಲಿ ಸಾಲ ಒದಗಿಸುವ ಯೋಜನೆಯನ್ನು ಎಲ್ಲ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಗಳಿಗೂ ಅನ್ವಯಿಸುವ ರಾಜ್ಯಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕವೇ ಮೊದಲು. ಸುಮಾರು ಎರಡು ಲಕ್ಷ ಜನರಿಗೆ ಹತ್ತು ಕೋಟಿ ರೂಪಾಯಿಯಷ್ಟು ಸಾಲ ಒದಗಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ.

ಸಮಾಜ ಹಿತರಕ್ಷಣೆ

- * ಯಾವ ಕಡೆವೂ ಇಲ್ಲದೆ ಬಡವರಿಗೆ, ಕುಟುಂಬ ಒಂದಕ್ಕೆ 125 ರೂಪಾಯಿಯಂತೆ ಕೈಸಲ ಕೊಡಲಾಗುತ್ತಿದೆ. ಸುಮಾರು ಐದು ಲಕ್ಷ ಕುಟುಂಬಗಳಿಗೆ ಈ ಸೌಕರ್ಯ ಒದಗಿಸಲು 6.20 ಕೋಟಿ ರೂಪಾಯಿ ನಿಗದಿ ಮಾಡಲಾಗಿದೆ.
- * ಇಪ್ಪತ್ತು ಲಕ್ಷಕ್ಕೂ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಶಾಲಾ ಪೂರ್ವ ಮಕ್ಕಳು, ಗರ್ಭಿಣಿಯರ ಹಾಗೂ ಬಾಣಂತಿಯರಿಗೆ ಮಧ್ಯಾಹ್ನದ ಊಟ ಮತ್ತು ವೈದ್ಯಕೀಕ ಆಹಾರ ಯೋಜನೆಯ ಸೌಲಭ್ಯ ದೊರಕುತ್ತಿದೆ. ಈ ವರ್ಷ ಈ ಯೋಜನೆಗಳಿಗಾಗಿ 84 ಕೋಟಿ ರೂಪಾಯಿ ಒದಗಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ.
- * ಒಂದೂವರೆ ಲಕ್ಷಕ್ಕಿಂತ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಜನರು ಐದು ಪರಿಹಾರ ಕಾಯಿದೆಯ ಪರಿಹಾರ ಪಡೆದಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಅವರು ಒಂಭತ್ತು ಕೋಟಿ ರೂಪಾಯಿಗೂ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಸಾಲದಿಂದ ಮುಕ್ತರಾಗಿದ್ದಾರೆ, ವಾರ್ಷಿಕ ವರವಸನ 2,400 ರೂಪಾಯಿಗಿಂತ ಕಡಿಮೆ ಇರುವ ಸಣ್ಣ ರೈತರು ಭೂರಹಿತ ಕಾರ್ವಿಗಳರು ಮತ್ತಿತರ ದಲಿತ ವರ್ಗದವರು ಈ ಕಾಯಿದೆಯಿಂದ ಪರಿಹಾರ ಪಡೆಯಲು ಅರ್ಹರು.

ಉದ್ಯೋಗ

- * ಪದವಿಭರರು ಮತ್ತು ಡಿಪ್ಲೊಮಾ ಕೊಂಡಿರುವವರಿಗೆ ಉದ್ಯೋಗ ಖತ ಸಂಪಾದನೆ ಮಾಡುವವರೂ ಇಲ್ಲದ ಕುಟುಂಬದಲ್ಲಿ ಪದವಿಭರರು ಮತ್ತು ಡಿಪ್ಲೊಮಾ ಪಡೆದಿರುವವರಿಗೆ, ತಿಂಗಳಿಗೆ 150 ರೂಪಾಯಿ ಭತ್ಯೆಕೊಟ್ಟು ವಿವಿಧ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ನೇಮಿಸಲಾಗುವುದು.
- * ಹಿಂದುಳಿದ ವರ್ಗಗಳ ಅಯೋಗದ ಸಲಕೆಯಂತೆ, ಉದ್ಯೋಗಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಹರಿಜನ ಗಿರಿಜನರಿಗೆ ಕಾದಿರಿಸುವ ಶೇಕಡ 18ರಷ್ಟರ ಜೊತೆಗೆ ಹಿಂದುಳಿದ ವರ್ಗಗಳಿಗೆ ಶೇಕಡ 40ರಷ್ಟು ಉದ್ಯೋಗಗಳನ್ನು ಕಾದಿರಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ. ಯಾವ ಜಾತಿ, ಕುಲಕ್ಕೂ ಗಣನೆಗೆ ತಂದುಕೊಳ್ಳದೆ, ವಾರ್ಷಿಕ ವರವಸನ 4,800 ರೂಪಾಯಿಗಿಂತ ಕಡಿಮೆ ಇರುವವರೆಲ್ಲ ಹಿಂದುಳಿದವರೆಂದು ಪರಿಗಣಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ.

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ಮತ್ತು ಪ್ರಚಾರ ಇಲಾಖೆಯ ಪ್ರಕಟಣೆ.

NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPATCHERS

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FUTURE OF THE NEWSLETTER

Zafar Futehally

What a lot of encouraging letters have come in, in response to my circular
letter about the financial problems of the Newsletter:

"I think it would be an awful shame if the Newsletter has to cease publication
because of financial problems" Nazir Latif

"I am anxious that the Newsletter should be sustained and continued....."
PT Thomas

"Of course you should raise the subscription to the Newsletter. My simple
mind tells me that if you have a deficit of Rs.2570, and there are only 218
subscribers likely to pay up, you should ask them for an extra Rs.10 rather
than Rs.5/-" RE Hawkins

"Apart from the interest of the Newsletter contents, it binds us into a fellowship of people who have a splendid hobby - and must therefore obviously be splendid people themselves!" Thomas Gay

are

There/over a hundred letters in similar vein, and only two - one from David Fernandes and another from Kishorebhai Gohil, suggest that the subscription should not be raised since it may cause hardship to young people. David has gallantly agreed to produce advertisements of Rs.2000 and more to cover the deficit. I will remind him about this with my New Year Greetings.

Several donations have come in including a cheque of Rs.200 from Dr Salim Ali; Rs.50 from Mr RE Hawkins; Rs.51 from Mr Prakash Gole; Rs.16 from Mrs Aloo JD Kapadia, and an advance subscription of Rs.15 from Mrs Sarah Jameson. Some who had not paid for the current year have sent in their amounts.

By and large, I think, a sensible course would be to "trust in God, but tie the camel's leg", and in our case, to raise the subscription to Rs.15/-.

I am now faced with another serious problem. When I edited the Newsletter from Bombay JS Serrao was a great help in striking the stencils and helping with references, scientific names, etc. When I came to Bangalore KC Kartha took over, and has by now become proficient in editorial matters and in the techniques of production. Unfortunately, Kartha is leaving for domestic reasons, and until a new incumbent acquires the necessary expertise you may have to put up with thin issues and spelling mistakes, etc.

However, I am greatly fortified by the many good wishes received, and I have no doubt that we will get along.

** **

(Bull. B.O.C.1977:97(3))

NOTES ON TOOL-USING BY EGYPTIAN VULTURES, *NEOPHRON PERCNOPTERUS*

Jeffery Boswall

[Communicated by Peter Jackson with the remark: "How about an experiment in India. I meant to do it myself before I left". Since we have the same species in India, we might try and find out whether our birds act in similar fashion. Here is an opportunity for some of our readers. Editor/

It is worth placing on record that the use of stones to break open an egg of the Ostrich *Struthio camelus* was experimentally induced in a wild Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* on the football pitch at the Mitchell-Cotts estate near Tendaho, Wollo Province, Ethiopia, on about 9 May 1970. The shell of an Ostrich egg was purchased in a local curio shop, filled with water, sealed, put out and almost immediately bombarded by a local Egyptian Vulture. No notes were made but a film showing the behaviour was taken (Fisher 1970). The sequence with the vulture bombarding the egg runs about 1 1/2 minutes. The film implies that the behaviour was seen in the Awash

National Park, Shoa Province, but in fact it was observed near Tendaho, well to the north. The behaviour of the bird appears to be similar to that described by the Lawick-Goodalls (1966,1968).

Alcock (1970), writing on the possible origin of tool-using by the Egyptian Vulture, attributes to the Lawick-Goodalls the view that the bird's use of stones was "restricted to a limited population of vultures" and that "stone-throwing by vultures is widespread in only one area". For fear that this misquotation be perpetuated it is worth drawing attention to the fact that the Lawick-Goodalls (1968) specifically say "... we have not yet learned whether stone-throwing is a local custom or common to the species as a whole".

Baxter et al. (1969) drew attention to a nineteenth century reference to the use of tools by the Egyptian Vulture by Wood (1877), who, it seemed likely, had heard or read a first or second hand account of the behaviour. The account was clearly that of Sir James Alexander quoted by Anderson (1856). On the authority of the natives about the Orange River in southwest Africa, Sir James says that when the Ostriches leave their nests in the middle of the day "a white Egyptian Vulture may be seen soaring in mid-air, with a stone between his talons. Having surveyed the ground below him, he suddenly lets fall the stone, then follows it in rapid descent. Let the hunter run to the spot, and he will find a nest of probably a score of eggs, some of them broken by the vulture". This method must await confirmation by modern observers, but I think we can safely accept that the vultures were responsible for breaking the Ostrich eggs by one means or another. Another nineteenth century reference is that of Myers (1876). He and a companion in March 1875 concealed themselves near the nest of an Ostrich near Kassala in the Sudan, intent upon shooting the returning bird. "After an hour... two visitors in the form of vultures pounced down upon the nest, and, apparently quite satisfied with the certainty of a quiet feast, commenced operations by a personal hunt amongst their own feathers, then a general survey was made of the white objects before them; and finally having retired for a moment, each returned with a stone in its beak and set to work to hammer a hole through the shell of an egg".

Thus the use of tools by Egyptian Vultures is established in localities as far apart as 5,000 km in Africa. Since the birds respond so readily to eggs put out for them (Lawick-Goodalls 1966, 1968, Richard Brock (pers. comm). and this note, it would be interesting to experiment elsewhere, particularly in areas where the Ostrich is now extinct and even perhaps in places where it has never been recorded but where the vulture lives, for examples in Spain.

SOME EXAMPLES ABOUT "THE CHRONOLOGICAL TIME-SENSE IN BIRDS"

A Navarro

With reference to the article "The Chronological Time Sense in Birds" by Dr Salim Ali in The Newsletter for Birdwatchers of July 1974, I should like to mention that on several occasions I have observed the same phenomena. I have always been overcome by wonder at the punctuality and rhythm of bird behaviour and their way of life.

I will mention only a few examples of my own experience. Once I was keen on collecting the eggs of the King Vulture for my egg collection. I was almost certain about the area where the nest could be. As I was strolling about the expected locality I observed for a few days that every day at 12 noon a King Vulture appeared in the sky, his flight was fast, straight and always in the same direction and my suspicions grew stronger. The next day I waited for the appearance of the King Vulture; with the help of my binoculars I followed his flight and I saw the King Vulture alighting on the top of a large banyan tree in the ravine facing Duke's Nose. As the Vulture approached the nest he performed a brief ritual (ceremony) display; the bird on duty flew off and the new comer took his place. Two days later I went down the ravine to inspect the nest. I found two eggs, rather advanced in incubation. I left the eggs for the King Vulture in order that its dynasty may not be broken.

Once my attention was struck by the punctuality of the evening calls of the Jungle Cock, *Gallus Sonneratii*. It was just 7.00 p.m. Taking advantage of this fact I decided to taperecord his calls since that was a way to check for a few days more the exactitude of his evening calls. Accidentally I disclosed this fact to some of my friends residing at Khandala Hotel. As the distance from the Hotel to the spot where the Jungle Cock was calling was only fifteen to twenty minutes walk, on their own initiative by way of an evening walk and curiosity, they went several times to check the evening calls of the Jungle Cock. Their conclusion was that the Jungle Cock was so punctual that you could even time your watch by their evening calls.

Many years ago I made an attempt to take the census of the Common House Crow population of Khandala. As I found that it was rather confusing to do the counting alone, I requested a few of my friends if they were ready to be involved in this scheme. At the end of several countings we came to the conclusion that the total strength of the population of the Common House Crow of Khandala was 250. Such an enterprise was only feasible after a series of observations as regards the timings of the crows going to the spot where they gathered in batches to fly to their roosting resort; at the same time to check on the rhythm of their aerial route to their final destination. All these observations were done one year as a preliminary preparation for the following year.

The continual flow of Crows arriving at their gathering spot started at 5.15 p.m. and continued until 7.00 p.m. I will divide this time in three phases A.B.C.

Phase A:- The first half an hour the flow of batches arrived at their waiting post at intervals from 4 to 8 minutes. The strength of these batches were from 5 to 9 crows and the time spent waiting was no longer than 5 to 9 minutes, till fly off.

Phase B:- The second half an hour the flow of batches arrived at their waiting post at intervals of 3 to 5 minutes and the strength of these batches varied from 14 to 26 crows. The time spent on the waiting post was from 3 to 5 minutes, till fly off.

Phase C:- The third half an hour the flow of batches arrived at their waiting post at intervals of 5 to 12 minutes, the strength of these batches were from 2 to 6 crows. The batches arriving during the first fifteen minutes of this phase used to stop at their waiting stop from 1 to 2 minutes at the most, and the crows arriving during the second fifteen minutes used to fly off without stopping.

Often at the waiting spot more than one batch used to meet together, and at the time of flying off usually the members of one batch did not mingle with those of other batches; the identity of each batch was maintained throughout the aerial path. Only when they went near their roosting grounds, the batches used to disintegrate mixing all together forming a communal group uttering loud and harsh cawing calls. That was the way they entered their roosting grounds.

Some years ago, through the May vacations, I spent more than a week, in the evenings from 5.15 to 7.15, birdwatching by the side of a waterspot at the entrance to a ravine in Khandala.

I will give below an account of the birds that visited the spot daily, between the hours of 5.15 and 7.15 p.m. A few came every day at the same time; the presence of others at the water spot was confined to the hours already mentioned.

It was the end of the dry season. The streamflow was reduced to a thin rivulet; in a deep depression on the rocky ground a small pool of clear and cool water had formed.

Late in the evening the whole area was shadowed by large and tall trees; the lower surface was a thick mass of dry grass, lantana, creepers and strobilanthes. The little pool was concealed from all sides, except for a wide opening on one side of the stream. The regular visitors made their way to the pool along the stream or through the wide opening. On their arrival at the pool, most birds settled down for a few minutes at a short distance from the water and finally descended to the ground. After their drink, some birds took to the wing; others perched again for a short while and before their departure, they had a second sip. I noticed that most visitors made their way off from the pool by the way that they had taken when coming in.

The first to arrive were a pair of Emerald Doves, at 5.30; a few minutes later a small group of Blacknaped Blue Flycatchers gathered around the pool, apparently with preference for a bath more than for a drink. This brought about a good deal of activity, getting in and getting out of the water, for a while. Then a pair of Redwhiskered Bulbuls visited the pool for their usual drink. Around six, I could hear the typical noise of the approaching female Jungle Fowl; she was visible only at the moment of drinking. She made her way always under cover. The next to come to the pool was a bevy of Jungle Quail. One day they failed to come to the water spot. At about 6.20 a Fantail Flycatcher made his appearance around the pool, on his way down to the forest. I never saw this flycatcher drinking at the pool. About the same time a pair of Spotted Doves were at the pool for their evening drink.

These doves and the Emerald Doves were the only birds who had access to the pool through the wide opening by one side of the stream. Just around 6.40 a Whistling Thrush uttering its usual call, made its way along the stream into the forest.

The last and the most punctual was a single Scimitar Babbler; his timing was 6.50. His first stop was a hanging creeper crossing the stream. Here he preened his feathers for a while. From now on to the pool, his movements were made with such precision that I could foresee what he was intending and followed his way to the pool and back to the creeper, where for the second time he preened his feathers and finally flew back into the forest.

BIRD COLLISION AND VISION IN BIRDS

RK Bhatnagar

This is with reference to 'Vision in Birds' by Mr TV Jose and Dr Saiduzaffar. The latter has amply explained some anatomical features and technical points. It is a very interesting subject involving behavioural aspects and may be useful in understanding some aspects of aircraft and bird collisions. Bird collisions in many situations may be due to any of the following: (1) distraction of attention; (2) chasing of birds by predator leading them to attempt an escape; (3) lack of vision acuity; (4) accidents due to lack of flight manoeuvrability (as in unusual air currents in flight path, fast winds etc; suction due to jet engines and flight in flight course of birds); (5) due to presence of barriers (prominent or otherwise) in their flight paths. Barriers which are not prominent from the vision point of view viz. colour differentiation, etc. (as in operation of mist nets) or due to their transparent nature. Image reflecting opacity (as in mirrors) or glass panes covered on one side with a dark back-ground (viz. dark curtains) may also lead to collision.

I happened to have the opportunity of studying bird collisions on glass panes a number of times while working on control/management of nuisance birds in a residential complex. We were posed with the problem of controlling collisions of sparrows and pigeons on large glass panes (window, ventilators and doors). The study revealed that these glass panes were at flight level of birds. In fact when the birds rose, they saw a clear bright landscape across the glass panes and in the flight course they collided. Obviously, management of the problem is simple - by making the panes prominent (painting or hanging curtain cloth) by obstructing the clear view and closing the entry points or by putting barriers (nettings) in their flight paths.

In some situations birds collide with prominent structures (clear to vision) within their migratory passage. On this aspect we do not have good examples from India. But from the United States, such examples are abundant particularly from high buildings like the Washington Monument; Empire State Building; Radio and Television towers; "guy wire" lines and high cooling towers (Davis Besse Nuclear Station) near Port Clinton. Studies indicated that duck and gulls avoid the structures. Obviously judgement is good in the species.

Therefore similar observations on responses, etc. from other species deserve attention. Studies have reported that Pigeons fly in through the entry passages (upper apertures), robins and starlings nested in the infrastructures of the tower without any difficulty. Occasionally Ruby Crowned kinglets entered the tower and being unable to fly out fell within it. A notable point is that "strong and complex air-currents both around and within the tower structure, obviously can affect bird flight patterns".... and have not been studied. When in operation, the natural draft tower will have altered characteristics." The installation of air flow baffles at the bases blocked the entry of migratory birds. Avian mortalities differ in various sectors of such structures and would obviously vary in relation to seasonal migratory flight direction. Also, local air flow currents and avian flight needs consideration, i.e. "meteorological factors and migration which are closely related" to bird mortality. Of various repellents shown to reduce mortality the red navigational lights show promise, while flood lights during migration have been known to increase mortality.

BIRDS AND AIRCRAFT

KSR Krishna Raju

This note is the outcome of my feelings after seeing the news item entitled Bird Hits, A Major Menace to Aircraft (The Hindu, dt. 5.5.1976). Let us agree that birds are causing considerable damage to aircraft and a solution has to be found to minimise this. But I am sure none of us will agree with the contention that the remedy lies in destruction of feeding, roosting and breeding grounds around air ports. Such measures would only result in creating havoc as far as ecological balances are concerned.

This problem has to be examined from different angles and solutions are to be arrived at, only after careful analysis of the after effects. Firstly the bird hits are to be carefully analysed and patterns of damage, seasonalities, areas, species involved, etc., must be understood. Simply collecting bird remains from the damaged aircraft would not be of much help. Experimentation with different landing techniques, run way light colours, chemical spraying etc are to be made before a solution is found. All this involves full time research by a team of scientists (ornithologists, entomologists and physicists besides aero engineers). Why should not the Ministry of Civil Aviation or Defence sponsor such a study in collaboration with an institution like the Bombay Natural History Society?

I remember having read some time ago a few papers published by CSIRO, Australia, about some research done there at Sydney airport by GF Van Tets. He concluded his papers somewhat on these lines, (even though I do not exactly remember the wording) 'Airfields should be kept bird free. However, because the incidence (bird strikes) appears to be a function of the cube root of the density of birds, reduction in bird densities will only result in some reduction in bird strike damages when the bird densities are reduced by about 80%.....' According to him, numbers and varieties of birds declined after adopting measures like stoppage of dumping garbage near air ports, frequent mowing of the airport and treating the airport with insecticides, etc. In

another study he observed that most of the nocturnal insects that are attracted to airport landing lights are a source of attraction to birds and this can be reduced by taking measures not to attract insects. He suggested using Orange lights instead of white lights and proved in his study that such change is rewarding. However, International regulations governing civil aviation have to be changed, he added.

What we need in India under the present circumstances is such a study. There is no point in accusing birds as a whole and creating a hostile image among the public who, as it is, are very ignorant about the usefulness of birds. Let us think about solutions to the problem and not merely point our accusing fingers at birds.

THE MALABAR WHISTLING THRUSH

BT Harish

The Malabar Whistling Thrush is a tropical bird. The size is between a Myna and a Pigeon. The colour is black, but it has bright sparkling cobalt blue patches on the forehead, shoulders and tail.

It has very long slender feet, which enable the bird to walk on marshy ground. The bird usually haunts shady places near a stream. The most alluring feature of this thrush is its melodious song. It feeds on butterflies, earthworms and crabs.

Last year in the month of August I found only one chick of the Malabar Whistling thrush in the hole of a tree trunk. I took the chick to my home and fed it with semi-roasted chicken egg. Probably the young chick may have been two or three days old. The feathers were yet to cover the body. So in order to keep it warm I covered the bird with cotton. I used to give it food at half hour intervals.

Slowly the feathers started coming all over the body. Within ten days the chick started eating earth worms. It preferred earthworms to egg. When the chick was fifteen days old I left the bird near a pond when the chick started taking a bath. This was one of the hereditary instincts of the bird.

Every day I used to open the door of the cage and leave the bird free. The bird is so tame, that it comes to the cage when I whistle. It started whistling when it was three months old. One day to my surprise another Malabar Whistling Thrush was seen near the cage. After this **meeting** the bird in the cage became restless. So I decided to leave it free.

Now the bird is often seen near my house, but it does not respond to my whistle. I don't know what really has happened.

ON FIRST SEEING A WRYNECK, JYNX TORQUILLA

RE Hawkins

High on a tower in the star-spattered night,
Pendulous bags each holding a bird,
Finished the supper of dalbhat and curd,
Rex and his crew gather under the light.

Ruler and balance and ring-lists all right?
A parakeet nibbles, a nightjar, finch third:
All silent. But jynx-jynx is heard
As the fourth bag reveals a remarkable sight.

A small bird emerges, beak, neck and poll.
The head is upstretched, then suddenly sinks,
And twists in a curious elliptical roll.

To the left, to the right! It surely has kinks.
The total effect's unbelievably droll
Of this wideawake wryneck, this spell-binding Jynx

(This is the second poem received by the Newsletter. The first one by Nissim Ezekiel, entitled Paradise Flycatcher, published in the early sixties, has since become famous and has been included in many anthologies. Ed.)

CORRESPONDENCE:

WHISTLING TEALS - LARGE AND LESSER

Mosaddique Umar

I thank Mr AK Mukherji of the Zoological Survey of India for taking so much trouble in evaluating my letter (Newsletter September 1977). I have no doubt that being a professional, he is a dependable field zoologist. While I cannot stomach his estimate of 60 pairs of Large Whistling Teals in Western Assam (which is astronomically low), I shall try to clear the 'confusion' that he feels I have created.

It may be difficult for some to differentiate between the Large Whistling Teal and the smaller variety, but not for people like me (at least in this particular instance) who were born and brought up among these birds. I must admit that my knowledge of birds is hunting oriented. In my school days, I used to save my daily tiffin money to be able to buy a few shot gun shells for Sunday's shooting. So I learned the hard way that the Large Whistling Teal was larger and had more meat.

I have mentioned the two teals for the simple reason that they have common habitat. For the satisfaction of Mr Mukherji, I shall now try to describe some peculiarities of the two kinds of teals in question. Unlike its smaller cousin, the large Whistling Teal has a white band across its tail which is more clearly visible in flight. While the Lesser Whistling Teal's flight is irregular, with sudden turns and twists, the large one has a steadier flight with uniform wing beats. On the whole, the larger teal's formation flying looks better and more duck like. The flight, in this case, is an important identification mark. The Lesser Whistling Teal's call starts with a repeated 'chank, chank' which is followed by sea-sicklic, sea-sicklic'. The latter sound is uttered in a double whistle. The vocal chord of the Large Whistling Teal seems to lack this double note quality. Its call is, at the time of taking off, 'chic, chic' uttered at short intervals. After the bird has flown some distance, the call becomes a drawn out 'cha-ka-ngkh' which is repeated at fairly long intervals. This sound is enough to identify this teal both in day and night. While flying in formation, the Large Whistling Teals call one by one. More often than not all Lesser Whistling Teals in a flock call together, creating a racket. I am absolutely sure that the two teals have quite different calls and that they can be differentiated at night by their calls alone, provided of course that one has known them closely enough.

That only 60 pairs of Whistling Teals were left in Assam, was by no means my concoction. The Hindustan Standard of Calcutta (Sept 30, 1975) published the great news quoting one Zoological Survey of Calcutta (not India). It would have been more appropriate had Mr Mukherji, instead of challenging my ability to differentiate one kind of whistling teal from the other, contradicted the said news paper report which made such fun of the ZSI people and their field skill. As a man from Goalpara district of Assam, I will be interested to know which places Mr Mukherji visited in course of his survey of 1975.

I wish Mr Mukherji were with me from late October to late November, when the two kinds of whistling teals can be heard at night fairly frequently as they leave their summer breeding grounds. During this time, the migratory ducks will also be returning from their summer homes far in the north. I am happy to say that I will have the satisfaction of knowing when some of my winter friends, namely, the Grey Lag, the Bar Headed Goose and the Brahminy Duck, pass over Gauhati in course of their nightly migration flights.

THE FLYCATCHER AND A SANCTUARY

DK Vaidya

Well, well, it seems I have started something. I did not know that my little flycatcher would take me to far away Sri Lanka.

I am grateful for the helpful notes to both the editor and Mr Hoffmann in reference to which I would add this much. I have always found it difficult to describe the legs and bills of birds, the smaller ones especially.

The bird was not more than about five metres to my north and no sunlight fell from any side on the legs. I was looking through my 8 x 30 binoculars which

would bring the bird almost in hand. The legs may be yellowish or orange but they did not seem to be black or horny.

And the white eye patch was distinct, as I have described and even at a distance with the naked eye it looked like a ring. That is all.

The only question is, is an Eastern Himalayan bird likely to pass so far west as Eastern Saurashtra?

** ** * **

Now about Azalwad Sanctuary: I am at present at a town called Dhrangadhra which the late lamented Mr EP Gee could not pronounce as mentioned in his book. This is the district of Zalawad, now known as Surendranagar (S'nagar in short) on the north-eastern corner of Saurashtra.

My home-town Chuda is on the southern edge in Limbdi Taluka (sub-division), which boasts of the well-known and advertised Nalsarovar on its eastern edge.

But I am talking about a small lake or large pond of the town, Sayla, about an hour's bus journey from Limbdi and Chuda to the west. I visited the place twice. Once in the April of 1964 - first week and again in March '65 from the 9th to the 15th.

Unfortunately I have no notes here for '64 but have complete ones for 65. But I do remember the main difference. Here it is. There were pelicans and flamingoes in '64 at the end of March (28 & 29) which were absent in 65 in the second week. How many there were do you think? Only 90(!) Rosy Pelicans.

I tried to count them more than once, perhaps thrice, but could not make them 100. And the most wonderfully graceful flight of the bird world I have seen was the glidings of this bird while alighting on the water. From a distance of, say, half a furlong and a height of about 10 feet it would come slantingly as if on a toboggan. And even while almost touching the water it would glide for some distance before actually alighting. No bird can compete with it and vultures are nothing as compared to it. And here is the corroboration from the 'Birds of Saurashtra' "Large flocks of over 100 birds may congregate on our shores, creeks and lakes before returning to their breeding grounds." And "Equally amazing is it to see them glide just above the surface of water." And finally, "March to April appears to be the best time to observe these birds on inland lakes as they then congregate in large groups."

There were only a few flamingoes. I don't remember if they were five or twenty. But somewhere about ten, maybe.

In '65 there were none of either, but other birds were present in both the years. The notes for 65 say there were on dates 9, 10 and 11 March, Demoiselle Cranes in thousands; Coots and Dabchicks in mixed flocks, hundreds; shovellers, widgeons, Tufted and Red-headed pochards, Garganey, Cotton and Common Teals fifty or more. Not certain about the Gadwall at all. But

Pintails were there. Purple Moorhens more than hundred, Spoonbills, Ruffs and Reeves and on the 12th a pair of Spotbills, Godwits and Purple Herons. Then on the dates 14th and 15th I saw the female Brahminy Duck or Ruddy Shelduck, only a single bird. And that is that. But the lake is divided into two parts by a small ridge, and most ducks, cranes and pelicans and flamingoes were on the eastern open sheet of water, while the spotbills, the shelduck and Moorhens were on the western side, overgrown with rushes and reeds and which has the inlets and estuaries of water. There were of course a Darter, a pair or two of the Sarus Cranes and so on.

No hunting is allowed but I suspect that the smaller cranes are clubbed at night instead of being shot, because there were many feathers lying where the birds rested.

Few people know about this place and I thought that it should be visited every month for a year. I saw a flock of Flamingoes while passing in a bus about one to two furlongs away on June 10, 1967, and estimated their numbers to be somewhere between 60 to 80. So it seems they pass their summer there from about the end of March as before mentioned. That is all. It is not a Government recognised sanctuary.

HOW CROWS BENEFIT CATTLE

AP Gupte

To avoid the mosquitoes in their sheds, a number of cows spend the nights in an open space in front of my house. Early in the morning a couple of crows go around plucking ticks not only from the bodies of the cows but also from their eyes, ears, nose and anus. The crows perform the task quite expertly and seldom injure the cows who cooperate with them by remaining very still. The crows are much in demand among the cows and the latter keep pressing for the former's attention.

WHEN PEACOCKS BECOME A NUISANCE

AP Gupte

Peafowl are not a very common sight for the city-dweller and, when I was transferred to this small town four years ago, I was pleased to see quite a few of these birds wandering around my house. Protected by law and religious sentiment, they have become quite tame and are often seen grubbing for food in the backyard of houses and on trash heaps.

However, I soon found to my consternation that peacocks can be a nuisance too. As the monsoon approaches and the climate becomes hot, the cocks become excited and touchy. The slightest noise - the distant report of gun, the bark of a dog, the sound of a motor cycle, even loud laughter - sends them into a frenzy of startlingly loud yowling. The call of one peacock sets off a chain reaction among other cocks and the resultant cacophony forces one to spend many a sleepless night with murderous thoughts for the National Bird crowding one's mind.

Gradually, Nature swings the wheel of seasons and monsoon is followed by more pleasant weather. The breeding season of the peafowl is over and the hens become busy with tending the chicks. The cocks regain their composure and peace returns once more to the sylvan surroundings.

HOOPES IN HIGH HIMALAYAS

Ashvin Mehta

I was in Harkidun during the first week of September and was surprised to find, like Mr Saini (September '77), Hoopoes up to 12000'. They were not there during my earlier stay in the valley from 16th to 23rd June 1977.

KUTCH AND ITS MIGRATORY BIRDS

SN Varu

Kutch is a District of Gujarat State in India. As Kutch lies on the route of migratory birds so many passage migrants can be seen in August and April. Also some migratory birds are passing winter in Kutch at various places such as Sea shore, Rann, Jungle, Garden, Tanks and Jheels, etc.

In the winter of 1976-77 following migratory birds were noticed in Kutch during my birdwatching: Pied Chat, Pied Bushchat, Desert Chat, Isabelline Chat, Redtailed Chat, Blue-throat, Kashmir Red Start, Redbreasted Flycatcher, Redbacked shrike, Pale Brown Shrike, Great Reed Warbler, Rosy Pastor, Grey necked Bunting, Common Swallow, White Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Greyheaded Yellow Wagtail, Blackheaded Yellow Wagtail, Blue-headed Yellow Wagtail, Yellowheaded Wagtail, Tree Pipit, Short-toed Lark, Kashmir Roller, European Hoopoe, Pale Harrier, Marsh Harrier, Coot, Eastern Common Crane, Demoiselle Crane, Blackheaded Gull, Brownheaded Gull, Gullbilled tern, Grey Plover, European Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Eastern Curlew, Whimbrel, Blacktailed Godwit, Common Sandpiper, Red Shank, Little Stint, Common Snipe, Rosy Pelican, Brahminy Duck, Shoveller Duck, Common Teal, Bluewinged Teal, and so many others.

In Kutch Chhari Dhandh, Chhataradi Tank at Bhuj, Dhonsa Jheel, Ningud Tank, Vijay Sagar Dam, Sea shore of Mandvi and Devisar Tank are best places for birdwatching.

A THOUGHT FOR THE VANISHING SPECIES

PT Thomas

According to an item appearing in the Statesman of 24/25 September 1977 ("A Thought for the Vanishing Species"), the Black Partridge is apparently a vanishing species. At least, that is what one would gather from the context although the meaning of the sentence is not very clear. "The Great Indian Bustard, and only a little so the Black Partridge (Sic) make news if sighted." One would suppose that this means that the Black Partridge, like the Great Indian Bustard, is getting so rare that the sighting of

either of them is newsworthy. This may indeed be so, but I write to ask anyway if you can confirm that the Black Partridge has been officially listed as a vanishing species, say, in the Red Book of the IUCN or the WWF. Madhya Pradesh has plenty of partridges and quails although the Black Partridge must be scarce. I have myself seen it only once, and that too very recently, in several years of birdwatching here and elsewhere. One difficulty about identifying the Black Partridge by calls is that it is very nearly impossible to tell its calls from those of the Painted Partridge. I wonder if some of your readers could suggest a clue for telling the two apart by their calls?

LIST OF MUSSOORIE BIRDS

Robert L Fleming, Sr

(For visitors to Mussoorie here is a list kindly sent by Dr Robert Fleming, Sr., of the birds likely to be seen in October. Editor)

Streaked Laughing Thrush, White-tailed Nuthatch, Blackthroated Jay, Himalayan Jay, Jungle Crow, Greyheaded Flycatcher, Hill Partridge, Common Myna, Greenbacked Tit, Yellowcheeked Tit, Redheaded Tit, Pygmy Owllet, Spotted Scops Owl, Whistling thrush, Whitethroated Laughing Thrush, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, Redheaded Laughing Thrush, Striated Laughing Thrush, Grey Wagtail, Himalayan Goldfinch, House Swift, House Sparrow, Spotted Dove, Kite, Himalayan Pied Woodpecker, Brown-fronted Pied Woodpecker, Blacknaped Woodpecker, Dark-grey Bush Chat, Whitecheeked Bulbul, Rufous Turtle Dove, Himalayan Tree Pie, Neophron, Whitebacked Vulture, Lammergeier, Pied Wagtail, Blue-throated Barbet, Verditer Flycatcher, Brown Flycatcher, Whitobrowed Blue Flycatcher, Longtailed Minivet, Ashy Drongo, Chukor, Koklas Pheasant.

YELLOWCHEEKED TIT PECKING AT WINDOW PANES

Sarah Jameson

I was very interested to read JL Singh's account of "Grey Babblers pecking at window panes" in the October issue. Over a period of years, I have only once seen a Yellowcheeked Tit (*Parus xanthogenys vigors*) in this garden, and then suddenly, last April, one came pecking at my window almost daily for about three weeks. Strangely enough, during the same period, a friend in Wellington, told me he had seen a Yellowcheeked Tit pecking at his window almost daily! It could conceivably have been the same bird, since the distance between the two houses could not be more than half a mile as the Crow, or rather the Tit, flies! Soon after being visited by the Tit, on three occasions I found a Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*) pecking at my window. This Sunbird is not common here. There have been innumerable instances of the House Sparrow pecking at panes, and frequently flying into the house through open skylights, and once even a Jungle Crow. It all seems very odd - perhaps it is the Year of the Window-pecking birds!

AT HOME

Bird-enthusiasts visiting Shillong are invited to get in touch and to join early morning birdwatching jaunts, and in the tea and snacks at the end of it. A Browndipper that lives closeby is the star attraction.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS & DONATIONS

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Dr A Navarro of the St Xavier's High School, Bombay 400 001, is a regular contributor. Recently his recordings of bird calls were broadcast from the BBC.

RK Dhatnagar is an Ornithologist at the Entomology Division of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi 100 012.

KSR Krishna Raju, Spoonbill House, CDM Compound, Visakhapatnam - 3, is a keen birdwatcher and has done a partial survey of the Eastern Ghats.

BT Harish, Kailasaganga Estate, Cheekanhalli P.O., Belur-Hussan, is a planter.

RE Hawkins is one of the Vice Presidents of the Bombay Natural History Society, and is also the General Editor of the Encyclopedia of Indian Natural History, which has been planned as a Centenary "celebration" by the BNHS.

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SYMPOSIUM ON ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION BY ZAFAR FUTEHALLY

A Symposium on the Ecology and Conservation of Birds and Mammals in India was held at the Indian Institute of Science Bangalore from 11th to 13th Nov. 1977. It was organized to honour Dr. Salim Ali on his 81st Birthday and to stimulate research in the field. There were a large number of interesting papers on Ornithology and what must have pleased Dr. Salim Ali was that a number of papers were presented on the feeding habits of Indian birds and their status in agriculture. The Indian Council for Agricultural Research has taken this up as a serious Project in various centres and in course of time valuable data is likely to be collected which will help to draw a balance sheet about the beneficial effects as well as the damage done to crops by various species. The ICAR team came in for a certain amount of criticism because they have studied the feeding habits of birds without taking into account what is fed to young birds in the nestling stage. It is well known that nestlings are fed on insects and soft bodied creatures and this in a way makes up for the damage done to the crops by the adult birds. If the feeding habits of only the adults are evaluated then it would seem that these birds only cause damage and do no good at all.

Robert Grubb put forward his by now well known thesis of the role of vultures in the Gir. Grubb said that the accessibility of the vultures to Carcasses depends on three major factors 1) Visibility of the Carcasses from the sky 2) Vulture take off space. 3) Safety from predators.

In the normal course the vultures would get a certain limited share of Lion kills and the balance of nature would not be seriously upset. However, since the Harijans are on the look out for Lion kills and remove the hide the vultures are in a position to make short work of the available meat and the lion has to hunt again. Obviously this is a very disturbing element and should be ended if the Gir is to attain to its maximum natural potential.

A.G.T. John Singh and S.Murali discussed the behaviour of the Peafowl (Pavo cristatus) in Injar in the Ramnad District of Tamil Nadu. Among other things they observed that the breeding season started in September and continued into October and this contradicts what Salim Ali and Ripley stated. According to them in South India the breeding season for Peafowl is April and May. Apparently each Hen in Injar is accompanied by three to five chicks but occasionally six chicks accompanied the mother. A point of interest was that Peacocks of this area do not apparently bother too much about maintaining their own territory. Readers may recall that George Schaller stated in his article in the Newsletter that in the Kappa National Park the males were rather particular about maintaining their territories.

to be continued....

BIRDING AT THE HINGOLGADH NATURE CAMP BY DAVID FERNANDES

From the 6th to 9th October, this year, I spent 3 days at Hingolghadh Fort, which is situated about 77 km. south-east of Rajkot, in Saurashtra. These were 3 days spent in the midst of picturesque Gorad(Mimosa senegal) and Babul (Acacia arabica) forests, gorgeous sunsets and, of course, long hours of bird-watching. I was there, however, primarily to join the Rajkot branch of World Wildlife Fund-India, which was organising, for the third successive year, a nature orientation camp for children.

Hingolghadh, and the 1,300 odd acres of surrounding forests, is another one of those areas in India, whose lease on life has been extended by virtue of the protection given to it by its erstwhile princely rulers. In fact, these camps are made possible because of the deep personal interest in conservation of Shri Shivraj Khachar, the ex-ruler of Jasdan, who very generously makes available the Fort and the other facilities to WWF-India.

Most of the members of our Rajkot Committee came together as a group because of their interest in birds. They formed a society called the Prakriti Mandal(Nature Club), and subsequently the Rajkot Branch of WWF-India. This group is a good example of interest in nature conservation stemming from birdwatching.

They have a unique approach to grass roots conservation education. They do not stop at talking about it - they get down to doing it. Last year, they also organised a Nature Camp at Lok Bharati - a rural university - in Gujarat. Most of the trainees who pass through this university become teachers in villages or panchayat leaders. What better target audience is there to sell the conservation message to? Perhaps, people in the rural areas are the only ones who matter - if conservation is to succeed, in this country.

At the Nature Camp, bird-watching, nature walks to study vegetation, soil erosion, talks and slide shows on snakes, astronomy, swimming and bathing in a clear stream, all form part of the package deal to "market" nature and the idea that we have a precious few years for natural and wild areas like Hingolghadh to survive, if something is not done to check this indifference to nature and its protection. All the activities at the camp are conducted in Gujarati.

On the first day of my arrival, I went out with the bird-watching group. About 10 children, with K.P.Jadhav as the group leader, set out at about 7 a.m. Prior to our departure, Jadhav and I talk about the swarms of House Swifts(Apus affinis) wheeling, twisting and turning above the Fort.

To help me with my identification, Jadhav breezily sketches in my note book the various species of Swifts found in India, indicating on each sketch the diagnostic features of the bird. The sketches remain an excellent guide to field identification - but more about this later.

The children are unwieldy and it takes a little time to get them organised. In the meantime, Rose-ringed parakeets (Psittacula krameri) and Common mynas (Acridotheres tristis) make themselves heard and seen. At last we start walking. A young girl points to a bird, a Redvented Bulbul (Pycnonotus cafer). Jadhav tells them the Gujarati name and elaborates further. Their first lesson in bird-watching has begun. An Indian Wren-Warbler (Prinia subflava) plays hide and seek in a bush nearby, but my attention is attracted by something I obviously had not seen before - a White throat (Sylvia curruca). As we inch our way down the hill, pairs of Indian Robins (Saxicoloides fulicata) spritely and perky, keep appearing. They are very co-operative with the guides, - the male especially, - showing his white patch on the wings as he takes off, and the children get an opportunity of seeing them over and over again and recalling their name. A Baybacked Shrike (Lanius vittatus) - which I do not see at Borivili National Park - is seen eating a grasshopper. Suddenly the air is rent with a loud persistent calling. We are told that the Grey Partridge (Francolinus pondicerianus) is responsible for this. Someone remarks that there are many bird sounds: the melodic Redvented Bulbuls, Rose-ringed Parakeets, Baybacked Shrikes, Peafowl, and in the background the coo-coo-cooing of the Ring Dove (Streptopelia decaocto), all of which, on that clear morning sound like some discordant symphony. Enthusiasm has now been generated and, fortunately, there are more exciting things to follow. I notice a sparrow-sized, but thickbilled bird with a strand of hay in its beak. There must be a nest nearby so we follow the leader and many of us get the unique opportunity of seeing for the first time, a pair of Whitethroated Munias (Lonchura malabarica) at their nests. The nest has been snugly built right in the heart of a babul tree, secure amidst the tangled branches and thorns. The babul is a very useful tree for birds. Many of them make their nests in it, as it acts as a natural fortress against predators. On the previous evening I had seen a Ring Dove incubating its eggs on its very scrappy stick nest - also built in a babul tree. It was a ring side view of the nest, and we could see one egg hatched unlike the other pure white oval shaped one which were still intact. I looked at the nest wondering how the chicks would manage to stay atop that fragile nest.

We now reached the base of the hill and there is a great deal of rushing, jostling and fighting for binoculars. We have spotted a Blue Rock Thrush (Monticola solitarius). The russet colour of the hill side contrasts beautifully with the ashy blue of the thrush. The bird flies to another rock and everyone re-positions themselves. Binoculars are passed around so that all the children can have a look. We spent a good 20 minutes with the Blue Rock Thrush.

Everyone knows the Drongo (Dicrurus adimilis). His acrobatic performance is nonetheless much appreciated. But he cannot compete with the "dexterous" Bee-eater: taking-off, twisting, somersaulting and diving with masterly ease: the rust gold on his wings flashing in the sunlight. Greyheaded Buntings (Emberiza fucata)* sit pretty on the electric wires and we are now within hearing range of the Redwattled Lapwing's (Vanellus indicus) distinct "Did you do it". But before turning to go towards the nearby pond, the sharp hoarse call of the Wryneck (Jynx torquilla) ~~caught our~~ ^{attracted} attention. The bird was sitting midway up a dry twig, his head slanted, giving us the impression that it was listening intently to our conversation. This is the first time I have seen a Wryneck and at such close quarters noticed its streaked black patterns.

It's about 8 a.m. and the sun beats harshly on everything around including us. We have reached the pond, blue with the reflection of the Saurashtran skies. Accacia and Babul trees dot the pond. This is Redwattled and Hoopoe (Upupa epops) country - so many of them! A pair of Hoopes flash past and settle on the meadow nearby. The children are all impressed with their Zebra-like pattern of colours. We watch the birds progressing in spurts as if in a hurry, then stopping and probing their long, curved beaks into the ground, assiduously looking for juicy grubs. We go close and the birds unravel their fanlike crests, as a prelude to flying away. While the children are pre-occupied with the Redwattled Lapwings, Jadhav and I concentrate on a group of Dabchicks (Podiceps ruficollis) swimming in "circles" occasionally disappearing rapidly under water. I was amazed to read later in Dr. Salim Ali's book that these birds "when fired at with a shotgun often dive before the charge can reach them".

Like all areas where there is water, bird-watching becomes interesting and so we spend a great deal of time looking and listening at the pond. I get to see my first Green Sandpiper (Tringa ochropus) here, and register, under Jadhav's tutelage, its flash of white rump when it flies, as its diagnostic feature. A loud unmusical cackle announces the presence of the White-breasted Kingfisher (Halcyon smyrnensis). The trees at the pond are full of doves and provide an excellent opportunity to distinguish between the Ringdove (Streptopelia decaocto), the Little Brown Dove (Streptopelia senegalensis) and the Red Turtle Dove (Streptopelia tranquebarica), all of which are common in Hingolgaad. We all see Brahminy Mynas (Sturnus pagodarum) and move on.

* (This bird is not likely to have descended as far South West as Gujarat. See handbook Vol. 10 page 227.) Ed.

A flock of voracious Rosy Pastors (Sternus roseus) fly towards the nearby fields. I see my first Grey Wagtail (Motacilla cinerea) of the season and then a host of birds, too rapidly for me to identify them if I see them in the field again: A Redbreasted Flycatcher (Muscicapa parva), Tree Pipits (Anthus novaecelandiae) Spotted Fantail Flycatchers (Rhipidura albocularis), a Rose Finch, a Wood Shrike (Lophodornis pondicerianus), one of the many and confusing Warblers, a Tawny Pipit and a Black Redstart (Phoenicurus phoenicurus). It was far too much to take in all at once, so I asked Jadhav to slow down a bit! Later that day, in the quiet of my room, "unidentifiable birds" I saw. All of them are migrants and Saurashtra, I get to know, is at the cross roads of this gigantic plexus of bird migration.

I am more at ease hearing the familiar musical call of the Tree Pie (Dendrocitta vachunda) and with the "tweet" of the Tailor Bird (Orthotomus sutorius). Before returning we saw a Crimson-breasted Barbet (Megalania haemacephala), and on our way up the hill, I confidently identified an Iora, only to be politely, but firmly, told that what we were looking at was the Marshal's Iora (Aegithina nigrolutea) which, unlike Tiphia the Iora which we see around Bombay, has a golden yellow collar across the back.

A little later I am introduced to the Sirkeer Cuckoo (Cuculus leschenaultii) "an obvious relative of the Crow-Pheasant (Centropus sinensis)". It scrambles away very rapidly through the bushes and low trees and does not give me much of a chance to see him more clearly. In the heat of the 11 o'clock sun, we stop to look overhead at a noisy Kestrel (Falco tinnunculus) hovering helicopter-like in one place, scanning, I believe, the ground below for a lizard sunning itself or a grasshopper.

Fascinated by all that I had seen of the bird life of Hingolghadh in the morning, I asked Jadhav out bird-watching once again in the evening. At a pace that made more sense, I delighted in seeing a Pied Chat (Cercomela fusta) - a neat black and white bird - "look for the inverted black 'T' on its tail" I am told. We walked in open meadow country and saw Redwinged Bush Larks (Mirafra erythroptera). The migrant White Wagtails (Motacilla alba) also arrive and once again the resident Hoopoes, Doves, Redwattled Lapwings and Indian Robins had to be consciously avoided so that I could concentrate on the "new" birds. While on that walk that day, a pair of Shikras (Accipiter badius) prompted Jadhav to embellish my book with excellent sketches, showing Harriers, Falcons, Kites, Hawks, a Buzzard, an Eagle and Vultures, in a sitting position and how they are to be identified in the field. That morning, I was also discussing the lack of artists cum bird watchers in India. Jadhav is the first and unique exception I had met. We were talking about this in the context of Roger Tory Peterson and I wondered to myself if Jadhav could do similar work in India. We proceeded on our long walk, with Jadhav calling out bird names in Latin, which was Greek to me, a most charming exercise, since Jadhav pronounces the Latin names with a Gujarati intonation.

BIRD WATCHING AT TANSA LAKE BY Br. A. NAVARRO S.J

On the 28th and 29th August of last year, the staff of St. Xavier's High school went to Tansa Lake for a short holiday. I was eager to have a chance to roam about that locality so that I could refresh my memories with the days when thanks to the co-operation of some school friends, we had all the facilities to move about that area. With this in view I joined the Staff party.

It being towards the end of the monsoon the way to the lake was in a very bad shape. On account of these circumstances we reached the lake rather late. I lost the best part of an early morning bird watching.

My first view of the lake revealed that the water had already reached the high level. My experiences of these lakes is that most of the avifauna are made up of Rails, Herons, Egrets, Bitterns, Cormorants, Storks and Ibises. All these birds will usually be located along the streams that feed the lake during the monsoon or on the shallow end of the lake as the level of the water goes down. These streams after the rainy season are well stocked with plenty of small fish, toads, frogs, snails, and a large variety of water insects. By the side of these streams there are water plants, reeds, bushes and tall trees giving to the birds not only food but also shelter and protection. An ideal environment.

For the time being these birds will resort to spots suitable to their diet and habitat. I come to this conclusion at the end of my first day of bird watching, since I could not spot a bird flying across the lake or along the edge of the water.

After tea I walked a few miles along the pipelines that supply water to Bombay. Late in the evening there are more chances to hear or sight birds searching for food or flying to their roosting resorts. Along the way I was disappointed, I saw only a few Spotted Doves a single Magpie Robin by the side of the pipes, and at a far distance a Crimson-breasted Barbet was calling. A small group of Roseringed parakeets were amongst tall palm trees. On my way back I could sight a few Redvented Bulbuls. I also heard the calls of a Crow-Pheasant.

We stayed at the Municipal bungalow, where attached to the building there is a large garden. A few members of the staff party pointed to me a stream of Mynas gathering into the foliage of a large banian tree. Suddenly I was aware that the garden was a communal roosting ground of the two different species. The common Indian Myna and the Indian smaller Egret (*Egretta intermedia*). The two species were roosting side by side on two different trees but in peaceful co-existence.

Most of the Mynas were coming from the side of the village but they were entering the tree from any side though none came over the lake. They arrived in small groups chattering and uttering their typical Myna calls. At the arrival of each group, for a few seconds, there was the appearance of a warm welcome. Both sides were increasing the volume of their chattering calls. The crescendo of a great excitement was at about 6.40 p.m. at the arrival of the last group. At this time along the branches there was a lot of pushing, pecking and shifting from one side to the other side as if each myna was claiming its own roosting place.

Throughout the day not a single Egret could be sighted on the lake. Late in the evening at about 6.30. a few Egrets were seen emerging from the left side of the lake flying straight towards the right side of the dump, entering the garden alighting at their roosting spot. They came one by one at intervals of two to three minutes, their flying was steady and slow, and as they fly rather low we could hear their deep harsh croaks becoming louder as they reached their roosting spot. In all, the number of Egrets was about twenty four, a small number compared to the Mynas, who must have been over a hundred and fifty.

As the banian tree was like a canopy over our rooms, I could hear throughout the night, the Mynas uttering a very low call now and then. Just after midnight the calling of an owl awakened me. It flew off and after some time it came again calling. Since it was a new call to me I could not identify the owl.

The next day the 29th at sunrise there was a revival of noise and activity on the banian tree. It did not last more than twenty five minutes, and as the Mynas flew off a few Egrets also flew towards the lake. The remaining Egrets were seen standing on the top branches of some eucalyptus trees. They were still and motionless for more than one hour and a half, and at that time no other birds could be seen in the garden.

Our companions wanted to know why the Egrets were there for such a long time. How did they keep their feathers so sparkling white, and so well trimmed? The Egrets standing on the top branches of the Eucalyptus trees were enjoying a sunbath. There are many birds, mainly sea birds who spend long hours sunbathing as can be seen during the winter months along the sea shores around Bombay. Some birds prefer a dustbath, like the sparrows. Other birds, for example, pigeons have a preference for a waterbath.

Concerning the Egret's white colour, it may be noted that there are two ways in which birds obtain the coloration of their feathers. The first one is by pigment and this case is known as Pigment colour. The other one is called structural colour. White and black belong to Structural colours. Since there is no black pigment we see white because it reflects all the light waves striking the feathers and the opposite end when all light is absorbed we see black colour. All these effects are on the basis of modification of structure of the feathers.

The Egrets can keep their feathers so white and well trimmed throughout the year because besides the normal features of other birds, they have two different types of feathers; one is known as Powder down which are continuously growing and disintegrating in a fine power producing a kind of a bloom on their feathers. The powder down provides the Egrets with a sort of Shampoo for degreasing soiled feathers. Egrets have comb-like appendage for use with the powder down. This comb-like tool is on the nail on the middle toe of each foot and its technical name is "pectinate".

The second type of feathers are known as Ornamental plumes. The Egrets acquire this second type at the time of their breeding season. One bunch of this ornamental plume is placed high on the rump almost covering their tails. The other

bunch is on the upper breast. Once the breeding season is over, the Egrets shed these ornamental plumes. For the value of these ornamental plumes, known as airgetts, the Egrets were persecuted in olden times by traders.

Coming back to Tansa the Egrets flew over the lake the same way they came and vanished into the forest. For a time no bird could be sighted around that area. Then suddenly I heard the loud screaming calls of the White-breasted Kingfisher. It came near perching on the branch of a tree by the side of the water. After a brief moment of silence, the King Fisher started uttering its repertory of sounds, at times as if he was screaming, other times as if he was laughing. I have always considered it to be one of the most noisy amongst the Kingfishers. I have noticed that this Kingfisher utters similar calls when flying through the forest as it does when flying over the water. On previous occasions I have seen in this lake the Pied Kingfisher and the small blue Kingfisher.

A few Jungle crows were seen around the lake at short intervals.

At a far off distance by the side of the lake where the previous evening the smaller Egrets were seen, a few Cormorants were sighted floating on the water. To all appearances they were Little Cormorants. On previous occasions I have seen Green pigeons all over the forest and around the lake, but this time I failed to see even a single one. Sometimes I have seen the Large Cormorant as well as the Snake bird,

CORRESPONDENCE

Narayan Singh

One way of generating enthusiasm and interest in the subject is by arranging periodic visits of well known Ornithologists to selected centres in the country. My own interest in Nature came to be aroused following the visit of Dr. Salim Ali to Indore in 1975. I wish also that we had more documentary films on Birds for screening in the Cinema theatres all over the country.

The difficulty in obtaining Binoculars in the open market is one factor which seriously comes in the way of the pursuit of this hobby. This problem needs to be solved.

Mrs. Indira Kohli

Some 'lay-man' information on the Sacred Birds of
Tirukalikundram

I visited the temple at Tirukalikundram on January 12, 1975. I was very keen to get a close look at the Neophrons and so I stood at the railing close to the Pujari. At five minutes to 12 I saw two Neophrons circling in the air high above the temple. The first Neophron alighted on the rock at sharp noon.

It preened its feathers for a few moments and then pecked a morsel from the proffered hand of the Pujari. It next commenced pecking at the food on the thali. At five minutes past noon it was joined by the second bird who jostled the first one out of the way. Within a few seconds they were joined by a squirrel who sat on the edge of the brass thali, picked up a morsel and also began nibbling. I was very nervous that the birds would attack the squirrel. They had highly predatory-looking beaks and we have a saying in Punjabi "Who will eat dal when he can eat meat?". After all, the birds are reputed to have been eating the same fare for thousands of years and though it is tasty (I ate a bit afterwards), the squirrel was plump! To my relief, they ignored it. After pecking at the food the two Neophrops walked to the edge of the rock and then flew off due north toward a far hill.

I was sorry to see the Neophrons leave. I liked them. They had a confident air and their plumage was in good condition. They had black heads and tails, and dirty white body feathers.

S.K. Reeves

Black Kites in Geneva

In the October issue of the Newsletter, Mr. Aamir Ali asks a question which I naively supposed could have been answered by reference to any reasonably good book on European or Indian birds.

He is seeking information regarding the incubation period for the Black Kite (Milvus migrans).

I decided to look it up, only to discover quickly why the question had been asked.

The usual run of books did not even mention incubation, let alone give the period.

Bannerman in the 'Birds of the British Isles' Vol.5 P.263 says "While the incubation period for the Black Kite has yet to be exactly recorded it is not likely to be less than four weeks".

'The Handbook of British Birds', Vol.III P.89, confirms the above and says "Period not less than about 4 weeks, but no exact records".

In respect of the Indian sub-species, Milvus migrans govinda, the Pariah Kite, the 'Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan' Vol.1 P.308 states quite unequivocally, "Incubation period unrecorded". As for the early writers- Jerdon, Hume, Baker, etc. - they are all silent on the subject.

Mr. Aamir Ali's supposition that the incubation period was 13-14 days is manifestly incorrect, as that is about the incubation period for a bird about the size of a Bulbul. The period for a bird of the size of the Black Kite would be, at the very least, twice as long. Obviously, he was unable to determine exactly when incubation commenced.

It would appear to be certain that both sexes take part in incubation, and that, in Europe, eggs are usually laid during the last week in April and the first ten days of May in the Mediterranean region and from early May to June in middle and E. Europe.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

David Fernandes works for the World Wildlife Fund India and seems well on the way to becoming seriously interested in birds. Before joining WWF he worked for the Family Planning Association of India.

Dr. Navarro SJ of St. Xaviers High School, Dombay is well known to our readers. He has recently had a serious eye operation with a further one in prospect. We wish him speedy recovery.

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We acknowledge receipt of subscriptions from the followings:

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